



NEW APPROACHES TO
BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Reign of Constantine, 306–337

Continuity and Change in
the Late Roman Empire

Stanislav Doležal



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To my family

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	<i>References</i>	16
2	Literary Sources on Constantine's Time	19
	<i>Postscript: Sources for the Period 193–293 CE</i>	40
	<i>References</i>	41
3	The Illyrian Emperors	45
	<i>References</i>	161
4	The First Tetrarchy (293–305 CE)	167
	<i>The Establishment and Functioning of a New Political System</i>	167
	<i>The First Tetrarchy (293–305 CE): The Emperors and Relations Between Them, Their Travels, and Their Cities of Residence</i>	172
	<i>Important Political Events During the First Tetrarchy</i>	179
	<i>Prefects and Prefectures</i>	187
	<i>Provinces and Dioceses</i>	193
	<i>Diocletian's Army</i>	196
	<i>Diocletian's Monetary, Price, and Tax Reforms</i>	200
	<i>The Persecution of Christians During the First Tetrarchy</i>	211
	<i>References</i>	217

5	Constantine's Life up to 306 CE	221
	<i>The Problem of 305 CE</i>	237
	<i>References</i>	243
6	Britain	245
	<i>References</i>	264
7	The Fight for the West	265
	<i>Constantine's Invasion of Italy</i>	286
	<i>The "Edict of Milan"</i>	297
	<i>References</i>	304
8	Licinius	307
	<i>The First War with Licinius</i>	307
	<i>The Second War with Licinius</i>	314
	<i>References</i>	323
9	Crispus	325
	<i>Investigation</i>	325
	<i>Analysis</i>	332
	<i>References</i>	339
10	The Final 10 Years	341
	<i>Prefectures</i>	342
	<i>Dioceses and Provinces</i>	346
	<i>Constantine's Army</i>	347
	<i>Constantine's Court and the Sacrum Consistorium</i>	349
	<i>Monetary and Tax System</i>	355
	<i>Constantinople</i>	360
	<i>Constantine as an Ecclesiastical Politician</i>	365
	<i>War with the Goths</i>	373
	<i>War with the Sarmatians</i>	377
	<i>Ulfilas</i>	381
	<i>Persia</i>	385
	<i>Conclusion</i>	389
	<i>References</i>	391
11	Epilogue: The Death of Constantine and the Massacre of His Relatives	397
	<i>References</i>	405

Appendix A: Claudius Gothicus as a Purported Ancestor of Constantine	407
Appendix B: The Panegyrici Latini	415
Appendix C: The Might of the Roman Army During the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian Dynasty	419
Appendix D: Constantine's Visions	429
Appendix E: The Year of Diocletian's Death	439
Bibliography	443
Index of Names	463
Index of Nations and Terms	471
Index of Places	475

ABBREVIATIONS

SOURCES

Ambros. <i>obit.</i>	Ambrosius, <i>De obitu Theodosii</i>
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus, <i>Res gestae</i>
Aug. <i>civ.</i>	Aurelius Augustinus, <i>De civitate Dei</i>
Aur. Vict.	Aurelius Victor, <i>Liber de Caesaribus</i>
<i>Cons. Const.</i>	<i>Consularia Constantinopolitana</i>
Cypr. <i>ep.</i>	Cyprianus, <i>Epistulae</i>
Dio	Cassius Dio, <i>Historiae Romanae</i>
<i>Epitome</i>	<i>Epitome de Caesaribus</i>
Euseb. <i>HE</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Euseb. <i>VC</i>	Eusebius, <i>Vita Constantini</i>
Eutr.	Eutropius, <i>Breviarium</i>
Flav. <i>Ant. Jud.</i>	Flavius Josephus, <i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i>
Herod.	Herodianus, <i>Ab excessu divi Marci</i>
Hieron. <i>Chron.</i>	Hieronymus (Jerome), <i>Chronicon</i>
Hieron. <i>De vir.</i>	Hieronymus (Jerome), <i>De viris illustribus</i>
<i>Chron. 354</i>	<i>Chronicle of the year 354 (Chronographus anni CCCLIII)</i>
Jord. <i>Get.</i>	Jordanes, <i>Getica</i>
Jord. <i>Rom.</i>	Jordanes, <i>Romana</i>
Julian. <i>Caes.</i>	Julianus, <i>Caesares</i>
Julian. <i>Or.</i>	Julianus, <i>Orationes</i>
Lact. <i>mort. pers.</i>	Lactantius, <i>De morte persecutorum</i>
Lact. <i>div. inst.</i>	Lactantius, <i>Divinae institutiones</i>
Malalas	Joannes Malalas, <i>Chronographia</i>
Mater.	Julius Firmicus Maternus, <i>Mathesis</i>

Optat. <i>Carm.</i>	Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, <i>Carmina Origo</i>
Oros. <i>Hist.</i>	Paulus Orosius, <i>Historiae adversus paganos</i>
Philost. <i>HE</i>	Filostorgios, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Plin. <i>epist.</i>	Pliny the Younger, <i>Epistulae</i>
Polem.	Polemius Silvius, <i>Laterculus</i>
Socr. <i>HE</i>	Socrates Scholasticus, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Soz. <i>HE</i>	Sozomenus, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Suet. <i>Aug.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Augustus</i>
Suet. <i>Dom.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Domitianus</i>
Suet. <i>Jul.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Julius</i>
Suet. <i>Ner.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Nero</i>
Suet. <i>Tib.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Tiberius</i>
Tac. <i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>
Tac. <i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i>
Tert. <i>Apol.</i>	Tertullianus, <i>Apologeticum</i>
Theod. <i>HE</i>	Theodoretus, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Theoph.	Theophanes, <i>Chronographia</i>
Zon.	Zonaras, <i>Epitome historion</i>
Zos.	Zosimus, <i>Historia nea</i>

THE LIVES OF EMPERORS IN THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA* (*HA*), LISTED CHRONOLOGICALLY

Hadrian.	Hadrianus
Ael.	Aelius
Anton. Pius	Antoninus Pius
M. Aur.	Marcus Aurelius
Avid. Cass.	Avidius Cassius
Comm.	Commodus
Pert.	Pertinax
Did. Iul.	Didius Julianus
Sev.	Septimius Severus
Pesc. Nig.	Pescennius Niger
Clod. Alb.	Clodius Albinus
Carac.	Caracalla
Macr.	Macrinus
Diad.	Diadumenus
Heliog.	Heliogabalus
Alex. Sev.	Alexander Severus
Maxim.	Maximini duo
Gord.	Gordiani tres

Max. et Balb.	Maximus et Balbinus
Valer.	Valeriani duo
Gall.	Gallieni duo
Tyr. trig.	Tyranni triginta
Claud.	Divus Claudius
Aurel.	Divus Aurelianus
Tac.	Tacitus
Prob.	Probus
Quadr. tyr.	Quadrigae tyrannorum
Car.	Carus et Carinus et Numerianus
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Justinianus</i>
<i>CTh</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>

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- RIC *Roman imperial coinage* (see Bibliography).
- ILS *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau, Berlin 1892–1916.
- AE *L'Année épigraphique. Revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'Antiquité romaine*, edd. R. Cagnat, A. Merlin, A. Chastagnol, et al. (Paris 1888-).

LIST OF MAPS AND GENEALOGICAL CHARTS

Genealogical Chart 3.1	The Severan dynasty	71
Genealogical Chart 4.1	Genealogy of Constantine’s line together with the “extended tetrarchic family”	171
Genealogical Chart 9.1	A proposed connection between the houses of Constantine and Licinius	339
Genealogical Chart A.1	Evolution of Constantinian propaganda on the kinship proclaimed between Constantine and Claudius II	413
Map 3.1	Map of provinces, important cities, and legionary bases in the 3rd-century Roman Empire. Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission	47
Map 3.2	Map of provinces in the Roman Empire and barbarian ethnic groups outside the Empire in the third century. Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission	108
Map 4.1	Map of the Roman Empire’s dioceses following Diocletian’s administrative reforms at the end of the third century. (<i>Source</i> Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 [awmc.unc.edu]. Used by permission)	194



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Despite its title, this book not only covers the political history of the Roman Empire in the first third of the fourth century, but also describes the entire previous century in order to make Constantine's career easier to grasp by placing it in a broader historical context. Apart from Constantine, therefore, other important figures of the era—Gallienus, Aurelian, and Diocletian among them—are discussed. Although these emperors are separated by decades (by the time Constantine was born, Gallienus was dead, the reigning emperor was Aurelian, and Diocletian was serving in Aurelian's army), the connections between them are clear enough: Constantine would never have become "Great" if Diocletian had not given his father Constantius the chance to become a member of the tetrarchy; Diocletian himself could hardly have conceived of a division of power in an empire that would be politically divided into three pieces; Aurelian would never have been able to consolidate the empire if he had not commanded the "new model army" created by Gallienus; and Gallienus espoused the reforms of Septimius Severus, whose reign started back in 193. We all stand on the shoulders of someone else, and when we discuss Constantine, we should consider not only his father and mother, but also the emperors of the third century. It would be near impossible to fully understand the tetrarchic period and the Constantinian dynasty without a detailed knowledge of the several decades' worth of war, chaos,

and social changes that preceded it. And just as the lessons of the tetrarchy are necessary to understand the time of Constantine, so a summary of third-century political events provides a natural introduction to the time of the tetrarchy.¹ Furthermore, all these stages are intertwined, and in this book they are perceived as a single coherent whole that avoids accentuating any milestones; not even the year 284, usually considered to be the beginning of the Late Roman Empire.²

And yet, out of deference to the practice for history books to be broken down into chapters, certain dividing lines did have to be established. This was an easy task in Chapters 5–11: they simply cover successive periods of Constantine’s life. With Chapter 1 describing the literary sources used in my work and Chapter 4 dealing with the first tetrarchy (293–305), Chapter 3 is best placed to serve as a historical introduction to the period of the tetrarchy. By reaching back precisely a hundred years into the past to the dawn of the tetrarchy, we witness the end of the relatively peaceful times of the Antonine dynasty and the beginning of Septimius Severus’ reign (193). These hundred years, with a particular emphasis on the empire’s period of crisis (approximately 250–290), seem to be the most suitable lead-in to the times of Constantine.

In a sense, this book is dedicated to the “Illyrian Emperors”, i.e. those emperors who were born in the Western Balkans and saved, stabilised, and reformed the empire. This line begins with Claudius II (268–270) and then moves on to Quintillus (270), Aurelian (270–275), and Probus (276–282).³ After a brief interruption by the reigns of Carus and his two sons (282–284), whose birthplace we do not know, the Illyrians continued their run with Diocletian (284–305) and three of his colleagues: Maximian (285–305), Constantius (293–306), and Galerius (293–311). A 4th-century historian said of them: “Illyricum was actually the native land of all of them: so although they were deficient in culture, they had nevertheless been sufficiently schooled by the hardships of the

¹ The date on which the tetrarchy began is known and undisputed: 1 March 293. Its end is less clear, but probably came in the year 310 (see Chapter 7).

² As the reader will find out in Chapters 3 and 4, Diocletian’s reign was far from secure in 284 and it took him several years to become the undisputed master of the whole empire. For a general evaluation of this period, see Cameron (1993, 1–4).

³ Technically, the first Illyrian Emperor was Decius (249–251), who was born in Pannonia.

countryside and of military service to be the best men for the state”.⁴ This is not the end of the Illyrian Emperors: Severus (305–307), Maximinus Daia (305–313), Licinius (308–324), and Constantine himself (306–337) can also be counted among them.⁵ Apart from Constantine, these twelve emperors created no dynasties, and in most cases they were not even related. Nevertheless, their dominance of the period described in this book means they merit detailed attention. They had much in common: the geographical area in which they were born, and their (mostly) low birth, paucity, or entire absence of education, considerable military experience, and similar approach to problem-solving. One of the aims of this book is to point up how Constantine belonged to this group.

Constantine was an excellent general, as was to be expected of an Illyrian Emperor, but on top of that he also was a brilliant politician. As a military leader, he routinely defeated the barbarians, be they Franks, Alamanni, Sarmatians, or Goths, and he emerged victorious from every civil war he took part in. As a politician, he managed to survive the difficult first six years of his reign (306–312), during which he proved to be patient, cautious, and astute, and succeeded in avoiding any damage to his career from the collapse of the third and fourth tetrarchies (see Chapter 4). Even if the tetrarchy is viewed as an experiment that failed (or that was bound to fail), Constantine is still someone who was in no small way responsible for the dissolution of this interesting system of government. He could even be said to have built his political career on the ruins of the tetrarchy, constantly trying to gain more political benefit for himself and for his nascent dynasty. From 312, he was the undisputed master of the West, and from 324 he ruled the whole empire. The only way to explain his remarkable achievements is that he had an extraordinary flair for war and politics. But that is not the whole story; Constantine was successful in many other areas as well. He carried on many of Diocletian’s reforms and continued to reform the empire’s administrative, military, monetary, and fiscal systems. His founding of a dynasty and of the city of Constantinople, and above all his adherence to Christianity,

⁴ Aur. Vict. 39, 26. Translation: Bird (1994, 43).

⁵ Most of these twelve emperors came from the area of present-day Serbia (Probus, Maximian, Galerius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine, and probably also Claudius II, Quintillus, and Severus), or from the area between north-eastern Serbia and north-western Bulgaria (Aurelian, Constantius, and Licinius). Diocletian was born much further west, in the territory of present-day Croatia.

presaged the completely new direction that the empire would take. This book stops short of those developments, however, by ending shortly after Constantine's death (save for a brief epilogue about the Constantinian dynasty).

There is one glaring problem in any assessment of Constantine's personality, accomplishments, and significance. He is generally defined and viewed through his religious policy, which, it seems, not only separates him from his predecessors but completely overshadows everything else. Whereas Diocletian and some of the other tetrarchs persecuted the Christians, Constantine not only became Christian, but also, in the second half of his reign, acted as if he were one of the bishops. And yet, Christianity aside, Constantine was in many ways a typical Illyrian Emperor who had much in common with the other emperors mentioned above. A perfect example of a supposed counterpart of Constantine would be Aurelian. Constantine himself denounced Aurelian for his alleged persecution of Christians,⁶ but if we compare their approaches to ruling the empire, we find that they tried to deal with similar problems with similar solutions and resembled each other probably more than Constantine would have been willing to admit. Not only were they born in the same area, but both succeeded in politically unifying the Empire, tried to reform the coinage, and preferred a single particular god. Furthermore, they defeated both external and internal enemies in vigorous military campaigns, and mercilessly suppressed all resistance to their rule (not to mention that both would later be rumoured to be cruel and greedy).⁷

Because of his adherence to Christianity, Constantine has proved a battlefield of historical interpretations for more than 150 years. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt viewed Constantine as essentially a completely non-religious man ("ganz wesentlich unreligiös"), driven only by his desire for power.⁸ Since then, many scholars, frequently motivated by *their own* religious beliefs, have expressed opinions on this issue.⁹ This debate is, I believe, largely

⁶ *Constantini imperatoris Oratio ad coetum sanctorum* 24.

⁷ To be sure, there were matters in which they differed, such as their treatment of the political opponents they had defeated: while Tetricus and Zenobia were allowed to live out their lives peacefully, Licinius was executed together with his young son (see Chapters 3 and 8).

⁸ Burckhardt (1853, 389); cf. Burckhardt (1949, 292).

⁹ For more on this debate, see Chapter 7 and Appendix D.

irrelevant. There is no reason to question the sincerity of Constantine's conversion to Christianity or the genuineness of his faith: Constantine was undoubtedly a Christian. But he also was a soldier and a politician, and many of his political decisions were "religiously neutral", i.e. it was irrelevant whether, in making them, he was a pagan or Christian.¹⁰ In addition, as the *pontifex maximus*, he was responsible for all the cults of the Roman Empire, which was still predominantly pagan. Besides, the Christian faith, as Constantine himself persuasively showed by his own actions, is fully compatible with political assassinations, wars, massacres, cruelty, ruthlessness, and an insatiable desire for ever more power.¹¹

As this book is largely about politics, the legitimacy of the emperors ruling during the period it covers and of Constantine's rise to imperial power is an important political issue. Many of the emperors ruling in the third century acquired imperial power by simply usurping it; any precise figure would be open to debate, but it was roughly half the total. Usurpation typically involved a general in a province persuading his troops, usually with the lure of money and promises, to elevate him to imperial power (for many such cases, see Chapter 3). If the usurper subsequently took control of Rome and the whole empire, won the backing of the senate, and eliminated his potential rivals, he became a legitimate emperor. This course of action became the norm after the year 193 and was prevalent until the time of the tetrarchy. After 293, however, it was virtually impossible for a usurper to gain legitimacy when he was up against four legitimate emperors. He could not realistically hope to contribute to the ruling of the empire in a situation where it was unthinkable for there to be more than exactly four legitimate emperors. When the tetrarchy began to collapse, not least because of the usurpations by Constantine and Maxentius in 306, the college of emperors—or at least its senior emperor—could rule that a usurper had gained legitimacy provided that the resulting number of emperors remained at four. Chapter 6 analyses how Constantine began as a usurper; the next chapters trace his career further and examine how he became a tetrarch, then one of only three legitimate emperors, then one of just two, and finally the sole ruler.

¹⁰ The great Theodor Mommsen (2005, 518) even wrote: "Ob Constantin selbst Christ geworden oder nicht, ist ganz gleichgültig; seine privaten Überzeugungen bilden nur ein geringes Moment".

¹¹ Not to mention that Constantine himself persecuted Christians (see Chapter 7).

If we were to group usurpers by how successful they were, the ones who failed are particularly rife. Chapter 3 contains many obscure names of usurpers who never achieved legitimacy or never ruled any area of the empire for long. Then there were partially successful usurpers who ruled a part of the empire for an extended period but never gained legitimacy (Carausius, for example, created an empire in Britain that lasted several years). Successful usurpers may have ruled the entire empire fleetingly (e.g. Macrinus, emperor for a single year) or for many years (e.g. Septimius Severus reigned for 17 years). Constantine was one of the most successful usurpers in the history of the Roman Empire because he not only ruled for 30 years himself, but he also founded a dynasty that spanned 57 years and had a profound impact on the history of the empire. Nevertheless, the beginnings of Constantine's career were difficult, and his path to power in the West in 306–312 might even be described as a search for a source of alternative legitimacy (see Chapters 6 and 7).

In their political struggles, the cast of this story, including Constantine, availed themselves of whatever political weapons were at their disposal. Aside from the obvious benefits of propaganda, attested on coins, inscriptions, and in many literary works (especially panegyrics), there was also the *consecratio*, or deification, of an emperor and its exact opposite: *damnatio memoriae*, or condemnation.¹² The senate was responsible for carrying out these acts, but they were, of course, ordered by the succeeding emperor.¹³ Deification came into play when the new emperor wanted to bolster his legitimacy by emphasising continuity with the reign of his predecessor. This honour could, however, be taken back after some time. Although deification was inherently pagan, even the Christian Constantine was consecrated after his death, and this practice lasted until the fifth century (and in the Eastern Empire until as late as the sixth century).¹⁴

Damnatio memoriae was employed whenever the new emperor wanted to distance himself from the previous ruler in order to boost his own claim to rule. It involved the removal or attempted removal of all mentions of

¹² This term was not used in antiquity, but it has gained currency in modern literature, and is therefore used here. The original term was *abolutio nominis* (“removal of the name”).

¹³ Although both acts did not occur until after the death of the emperor in question, the beginnings of the adoration of a living emperor can be discerned in the third century (see Chapter 3) and in the time of the tetrarchy (see Chapter 4).

¹⁴ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 53.

the hapless former emperor from public inscriptions; not only that, but his statues were overthrown and images destroyed. However, this practice was not carried out thoroughly, and the condemned emperor did not disappear from the world altogether. As with deification, *damnatio* could be repealed over time, paving the way for rehabilitation and perhaps re-deification. This was the case, for example, of the emperor Maximian, who revolted against his son-in-law Constantine in 310 and faced condemnation. Later, however, he was rehabilitated by Constantine (clearly for political reasons) and commemorated on Constantine's coins as the "divine Maximian" (see Chapter 7). The case of another of Constantine's relatives, his own son Crispus, who suffered *damnatio memoriae* in 326 and was never rehabilitated, seems to be a complete mystery (which I try to solve in Chapter 9).

The way emperors had themselves represented was another important element of politics in the late empire. Of course, emperors exploited self-representation for propaganda, an art mastered by Constantine. He can even be said to have had his own propaganda machine, consisting primarily of literary works propagandistic in their nature that were written during his own lifetime, such as the *Panegyrici Latini* (five of which were written for Constantine in the years 307–321), Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum*, Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, *Vita Constantini* and *Laus Constantini*, the poems of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, the extant fragment of Praxagoras' history, and the *Origo Constantini imperatoris* (the date of composition of which is, admittedly, unknown). Certain later authors—such as Aurelius Victor, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomenus, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, and Jerome—were influenced by Constantine's propaganda to varying degrees and should therefore be included as well.

This propaganda machine was obviously not built to tell the truth. Constantine, an astute politician, utilised any political tool available to him to his advantage, particularly during the first half of his reign, when he was fighting for his survival. These tools included half-truths, baseless assertions, and outright lies. Timothy D. Barnes listed some of these political lies, which he called "official lies" (e.g. fabrications designed to strengthen Constantine's political position), but omitted or neglected other instances where Constantine or his propaganda machine demonstrably fashioned lies or deceptions. Here are some of Constantine's "official lies" as listed by Barnes:

1. Barnes remarks that some scholars “found it hard to believe that Constantine lied about his age”.¹⁵ And yet the emperor clearly did lie on this subject, or at least condoned a lie about his age that was spread by contemporary sources that were close to him. Some of our sources clearly state that Constantine was born in around 272. Other sources assert that Constantine was young in 306 (or even at a later point), implying a later year of birth, about 280.¹⁶ Why? Barnes rightly concluded that Constantine’s disingenuous claim that he was a mere boy during the Great Persecution of the Christians served to dissociate him from it. Barnes was certain that Constantine was born on 27 February 273, and the majority of modern scholars accept either this year or 272.¹⁷ Still, the discrepancy in our sources has misled some scholars into asserting that Constantine was born in 280s.¹⁸

The confusion may have been exacerbated by Constantine’s shifting public image. One scholar even remarked that “no other emperor changed his public image as drastically or as often, and none was more resourceful in manipulating his portrait for propagandistic effect”.¹⁹ A good example is Constantine’s portrait in the Boar Hunt medallion on the Arch of Constantine in Rome, which was unveiled to the public on the occasion of Constantine’s *decennalia* in 315. Although the emperor was most likely 43 years old at this time, his face is surprisingly youthful—we see an emperor in his twenties.

¹⁵ Barnes, *Constantine*, 3.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5.

¹⁷ Barnes, *Constantine*, 38. While Lenski (2007, 59) opts for 272, Odahl (2013, 16) and Mitchell (2015, 66) seem to prefer the year 273. Both dates are accepted as possible by Elliott (1996, 17), Girardet (2010, 26), Drijvers (1992, 14), and Kienast (1996, 298). It is also noteworthy that some scholars are uncertain and cite a wider range. Pohlsander (2004, 14) placed Constantine’s birth between 271 and 277, Drake (2000, 156) between 270 and 280, Clauss (1996, 20) even “zwischen 270 und 288.”

¹⁸ See Potter (2013, 28), who argues for the year 282. Scholarly works from the twentieth century tended to accept this view as well, e.g. Syme (1983, 63) and Jones (1972, 2).

¹⁹ Wright, *The True Face of Constantine the Great*, 507.

2. Another of Constantine's propagandistic fabrications, as seen by Barnes,²⁰ is a story reported by Lactantius and the *Origo Constantini imperatoris* that Galerius tried several times to get Constantine killed (see Chapter 6). This story cannot be true, at least from a chronological point of view: both Lactantius and the *Origo* date these attempts to the time just after the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian. But Constantine must have left the court of Galerius either in May 305 or soon after, as he joined Constantius in Britain for the campaign against the Picts in that year.²¹ Nor can it be true that, when Constantine finally arrived there, his father was already dying.²² Moreover, our sources paint a very false, albeit highly dramatic, picture of Constantine's journey (indeed, escape) from the court of Galerius to Britain. But there was no need for Constantine either to hurry or to be afraid in May 305. The truth is that 1 May 305 changed everything: Constantius became the senior *augustus* of the "second tetrarchy", and his son suddenly ceased to be a hostage at the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia and became a guest at the court of Galerius. Obviously, he would now have been free to travel to the West whenever he wished, and there was nothing Galerius could do to stop him. Galerius would have perhaps been surprised to hear about the alleged perils Constantine faced at his court and on the journey to Britain. What we have here is just Constantinian propaganda at work.
3. According to Barnes, another deliberate political lie concocted by Constantine or his propaganda machine was the story of Maximian's death. Constantine's father-in-law rebelled against Constantine in 310 and was quickly arrested and either executed or forced to commit suicide; he also suffered *damnatio memoriae*. A later story, however, told by Lactantius in about 315, asserted that Maximian was first pardoned, then tried to assassinate Constantine, and was ultimately forced to hang himself.²³ Barnes' plausible explanation

²⁰ Barnes, *Constantine*, 4 and 52–53.

²¹ *Origo* 2, 4; *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 7, 5. Barnes (2014, 61–62), Potter (2013, 110–112), Lenski (2007, 61), Pohlsander (2004, 15), and Odahl (2013, 77) all agree that Constantine met his father a full year before the latter's death.

²² Lact. *mort. pers.* 24; Aur. Vict. 40, 2–4; *Origo* 2, 4; *Epitome* 41, 2–3; Zos. II, 8; Euseb. VC I, 21.

²³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 29–30.

for this embellishment of the story was that Constantine's attitude towards Maxentius kept changing (see (4) below).²⁴ In 317 or 318, Constantine disingenuously rehabilitated Maximian's memory and had him consecrated (*divus Maximianus optimus imperator*).²⁵

4. According to Barnes, Constantinian propaganda depicted Maxentius as a tyrant. This is true. Barnes considered the underlying conflicting religious policies of these two emperors to be the primary cause of this move²⁶; while this explanation is possible, political reasons are much more believable. Constantine and Maxentius were allies for the better part of a year: from summer or autumn 307, when Constantine married Fausta (the sister of Maxentius), to spring 308, when this fragile alliance ended (with Maximian trying to dislodge his son and being forced to take refuge at Constantine's court in Gaul). After the conference at Carnuntum in autumn 308, Constantine gained legitimacy from Galerius and, probably soon afterwards, allied himself with the new Western *augustus* Licinius, who was charged with invading Italy against Maxentius. After Maximian's unsuccessful coup, Maxentius consecrated his late father and accused Constantine of killing him. As mentioned above, Constantine's propaganda responded in kind, saying that Maximian, although pardoned, attempted to assassinate Constantine in his sleep.
5. Barnes asserted that a few sources conflated two wars between Constantine and Licinius (in 316/317 and 323/324) into one, while other sources correctly distinguish between these conflicts.²⁷ There was nothing, however, that Constantine could possibly gain from such a distortion of facts, and therefore, this confusion can hardly be a product of Constantine's propaganda.
6. Finally, Barnes remarked that Constantine's eldest son Crispus was executed in 326 and, as he also suffered *damnatio memoriae*, ceased to exist for the world thereafter. Strictly speaking, this is not an instance of political lies, but rather their conspicuous absence. Our

²⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 74.

²⁵ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 273–274.

²⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 4–5.

²⁷ It is true that the *Epitome* (41, 1–6) and Praxagoras (Barnes 2014, 196) report on the conflict between Constantine and Licinius in an extremely brief and condensed manner; but the wars are distinguished correctly by Euseb. *VC* II, 15; *Origo* 16–28; *Aur. Vict.* 41, 6–9; and *Eutr.* X, 5–6.

sources offer insufficient facts for a reconstruction of Crispus' life, much less for an explanation of his death (see Chapter 9). The story of Crispus was so heavily purged by Constantinian propaganda that today it is extremely difficult to fathom the true reasons for his elimination.²⁸ Instead of lies, which perhaps would have been too dangerous, Constantinian propaganda resorted to silence.

So far so good; but, as indicated above, there are still other instances of Constantinian propaganda that need to be examined and perhaps also called "official lies". For example, when Constantine had his former colleague Licinius executed in the spring 325, he could not produce any better grounds for this action than that Licinius had conspired with some barbarians to plot against him. Considering that Licinius was being kept under house arrest at Thessalonica, where he was undoubtedly closely guarded, this is not a plausible explanation at all (see Chapter 8).

Another illustration of Constantine's propaganda at work is the distorted narrative of his accession on 25 July 306. Some sources assert that the dying emperor Constantius I appointed his son as his successor and that Constantine accepted his promotion almost reluctantly. Other sources state that after the death of his father, Constantine staged a military coup and claimed the imperial title for himself (see Chapter 6). Whatever happened on that day, this episode proved inconsequential because Galerius quickly approved Constantine's elevation, albeit only to the rank of *caesar*. There were now two *augusti* (Galerius and Severus) and two *caesares* (Maximinus and Constantine) in the empire, and thus the "third tetrarchy" was formed. These two distinct narratives continue to be disputed. While the majority of scholars agree that what happened on 25 July 306 constituted the usurpation of imperial power, other scholars, Timothy Barnes in particular, believe that Constantine had been "long groomed for the throne" under the first tetrarchy, and therefore

²⁸ Suffice it to say here that virtually all modern scholars covering Constantine's reign either offer unconvincing explanations of this affair or dodge it entirely; see, for example, Bardill (2012, 258); Barnes (2014, 144–150); Clauss (1996, 50–51); Drake (2017, 105); Drake (2000, 237); Drijvers (1992, 60–70); Frakes (2007, 94–95); Guthrie (1966); Harries (2012, 258–260); Lenski (2007, 79); Odahl (2013, 205–208); Pohlsander (2004, 56–59); Pohlsander (1984); Potter (2013, 243–247); Potter (2004, 380–382); Stephenson (2010, 222–223); Van Dam (2008, 300).

that his accession in 306 was legal and just.²⁹ Barnes was mistaken; Constantine was a typical Roman usurper.³⁰

Another of Constantine's political lies is what Barnes only briefly conceded to be a false statement, namely that in 310 the emperor falsified his ancestry.³¹ Constantine's forged family connection to the emperor Claudius Gothicus was another political tool designed to strengthen and solidify his position, which had recently been shaken by his father-in-law's usurpation (for details, see Appendix A). This invention can (and should) be linked to another questionable assertion by Constantine in the year 310: his "pagan vision" of Apollo, and ultimately his more famous "Christian vision", although this last one appears to come from much later (for both, see Appendix D).³²

To sum up, Constantine: lied about the circumstances of his accession to power (in an effort to mask his usurpation); lied about his ancestry; probably lied about his "pagan vision" in 310; lied about the circumstances of Maximian's death; painted an unfavourable picture of Maxentius (although, strictly speaking, this is not a political lie); lied about his age; lied about his position at the court of Galerius and his journey to Britain; may have caused confusion regarding the two wars between Constantine and Licinius (again, this cannot be called a political lie); lied about the reasons for Licinius' execution in 325; and tried to destroy the public memory of his eldest son Crispus after 326 (of course, this is not a political lie per se, only by consequent implication). Overall, the score of Constantine's truthfulness is low by any standards. When it comes to honesty and integrity, Constantine was not that Great after all; given the opportunity, he never shied away from political lies of any kind. Some of them perhaps may be justified by grave dangers that Constantine faced at the beginning of his political career, but others were devised simply to strengthen Constantine's political position.

²⁹ Barnes (1981, 28); cf. Barnes (2014, 47) (*an heir presumptive to the imperial purple*); he relies primarily on Lact. *mort. pers.* 19, 1–5.

³⁰ See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion.

³¹ Barnes (2014, 73); cf. Barnes (1981, 35–36).

³² As argued in Appendix D, Constantine was unlikely to have devised the story of his "Christian vision" himself. At some point in time, he may have told Eusebius about it; but it is still more likely that Eusebius (who is our only source of it) is the true inventor of this story.

Constantine seems to exhibit the same amorality in the political murdering of his opponents, some of whom were his own relatives. Several of these killings appear to have been necessary: both his father-in-law Maximian and his sister Constantia's husband, the emperor Licinius, had to be eliminated. On the other hand, the murder of the latter's young son, the *caesar* Licinius, was hardly justifiable; and the executions of his sister Anastasia's husband Bassianus, his own son Crispus, and the disappearance (possibly execution) of his wife Fausta, although we are not provided details of their fate, show a Constantine as ruthless as he was resourceful in influencing public opinion and clearing his path to power.

In its thematic range and selection of individual aspects of the history of Constantine's reign, this book is principally a biography (if a biography of this emperor can be written at all), as well as an account of the political history of the Roman Empire in the years 306–337. Coming up with an appropriate title was a struggle, and I regret that my end choice reflects only the core of the book's contents. The intention was to follow the political history of the Roman Empire in 193–337, study the period of the tetrarchy in particular detail, and focus most attention on the years 306–324. Besides Constantine's political career and his private struggle for power, several related topics are discussed at length: Constantine's military operations, the development of the Roman army in Constantine's time, the changing administration of the Empire (especially the praetorian prefecture), the structure of the imperial court, currency reform (more specifically, the multiple reforms and their consequences), and Constantine's attitude towards Christianity. However, it should be emphasised that this is definitely not a book about religion. Many other topics could only be touched on briefly or were left out completely, such as the development of cities (except for the foundation of Constantinople), city councils, taxation, and the legal system. All in all, this is no comprehensive scholarly work on the Later Roman Empire.³³

It goes without saying that this book, much like virtually every book on Constantine, is not merely a retelling of the known facts of his life, as that would inevitably leave the narration very sketchy and full of big holes: there are many things we simply do not know, and therefore cannot

³³ Nor does this book handle how Constantine was received in the Middle Ages. I view Constantine mainly through the eyes of his contemporaries or the 4th-century sources; when later (primarily Byzantine) reports are used, it is in the hope that they preserve an authentic tradition and contain reliable information.

properly describe or explain. The sources are lacking in certain important information (e.g. we know nothing of Constantine's childhood), and we must bear in mind that information (such as the execution of Crispus) could have been, and was, deliberately suppressed—in both cases, extreme caution needs to be exercised. Conditions are even worse when our sources, with or without a clear intention or agenda, leave us with vague or conflicting information (e.g. Constantine's position at the courts of Diocletian and Galerius). Such cases always need to be treated very carefully: if we follow only one possible explanation to the complete exclusion of all others, we deliberately mislead the reader (and ourselves), and are probably wrong anyway. In that respect, this book seeks to be honest and consistently avoids presenting mere conjecture and assumption as fact. There are numerous controversial cases where the most we can honestly do is analyse all available information, add the hypotheses put forward by leading "Constantinian" scholars, perhaps offer an opinion of our own, and leave the matter unresolved. Sometimes the story must remain incomplete. Within the indicated time frame of 306–337, the emphasis is put on what I call the "neuralgic points" of Constantine's history, that is, events that remain controversial in their interpretation (such as the circumstances of Constantine's accession to power). An inevitable consequence of this is that the book teems with hypotheses, mostly raised by respectable "Constantinian" scholars, with a few added by myself.

Of these "Constantinian" scholars, Timothy Barnes is undoubtedly the leading figure. Three of his books are often cited: *Constantine and Eusebius*, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* and *Constantine. Dynasty, Religion, and Power in the Later Roman Empire*. Besides Barnes, the leading group of "Constantinian" scholars would include David Potter, Noel Lenski, Hans Pohlsander, Charles Matson Odahl, and Harold Allen Drake. At the very least, these authors are impossible to ignore in any serious study of Constantine and his age. Comparing the approach of these authors—literally *their Constantines*—is fascinating in itself. However, virtually any major treatise on Constantine (and in this sense, *every Constantine*) is worth our attention and can be a source of inspiration.³⁴ I am fully aware of the limitations of my book and can only

³⁴ Many other names deserve to be mentioned at least in a footnote: Paul Stephenson, Bill Leadbetter, Jan Willem Drijvers, Raymond Van Dam, Jonathan Bardill, Klaus M. Girardet, and Pat Southern. Yet other recent historians of late antiquity often provide valuable insight into our understanding Constantine and his age. The works of Simon

hope that it will appeal to readers of Roman history, despite all its flaws and *its own Constantine*.

Information in the most inspirational scholarly literature is usually followed by a description of the primary sources. However, I thought it best to write a separate chapter dedicated to this. As noted above, several important sources of Constantine's lifetime are perhaps vehicles for his propaganda, which then heavily influenced some sources further down the line. Few were truly independent (and, in some cases, hostile to Constantine). While it is essential to make use of every piece of information in all cases, we also need to proceed with the utmost caution. It is equally essential that we try to understand our ancient authorities and their intentions. In the following chapter, the reader will find a detailed description of all the Greek and Latin sources used in the writing of this book.

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Literary Sources on Constantine's Time

Sources referring to the time of the tetrarchy and Constantine are many and varied. Since this book is constantly drawing on, scrutinising, and critiquing interpretations of those sources, it would be useful to start by presenting them to the reader and, where warranted, shedding light on issues raised by the preservation, originality, intent, tendentiousness, or authorship of these works. In the following chronological rundown of authors whose works are essential to the study of the tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine, it is perhaps best to begin with Constantine himself.

The *Oration of Emperor Constantine to the Assembly of Saints* (*Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum*) is supposedly the work of none other than the emperor; whether or not this is true, it has been preserved for us by Eusebius as an appendix to his *Life of Constantine* (see below). This oration for an assembly of bishops was written (and perhaps—assuming it was intended for a Latin-speaking audience¹—also read out) in Latin, with Eusebius subsequently recording an official Greek translation. We know neither the year nor the place of the speech—the cities of Serdica (today's Sofia, Bulgaria), Rome, Thessalonica and Nicomedia (today's İzmit, Turkey) have been suggested. Timothy Barnes

¹ Edwards (2003, xix) opines that “it seems obvious that the speech was intended for a Latin audience”.

eventually concluded that it was given in Nicomedia on 16 or 17 April 325, though this does not reflect the consensus of contemporary historical scholarship.²

Constantine also authored letters and decrees preserved for us in Eusebius' work (see below). Beyond that, of course, he was the architect of numerous laws compiled in the *Codex Theodosianus* and *Codex Justinianus*.

Of the *XII Panegyrici Latini* (see Appendix B), a full five are dedicated to Constantine. They cover roughly the first half of his reign, with the first dating from 307 and the last from 321. Although panegyrics were undoubtedly composed in the 320s and 330s and, certainly, throughout the rest of the fourth century, there are no extant works of this genre dedicated to Constantine from the second half of his reign (unless we count Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius and Eusebius of Caesarea; for both, see below). Even so, we can glean useful information on Constantine's reign from the retrospective digressions made by panegyrics on subsequent emperors of the Constantinian dynasty, such as Libanius' Or. 59 to Constantius II and Constans of 348 (or 349) and Julian's panegyric to Constantius II of 356. These, though, are written in Greek.

Lactantius—full name Lucius Caecilius³ Firmianus Lactantius—hailed from North Africa. Lactantius converted to Christianity in Nicomedia, where Diocletian had appointed him a teacher of rhetoric. It was probably also here that he began to write *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (*De mortibus persecutorum*), which he went on to complete sometime after Constantine—perhaps around 315—made him tutor to his son Crispus, evidently in Trier. Lactantius was bent on showing that all emperors who, in his view, persecuted Christians had ended badly, and that good (personified in particular by Constantine) had triumphed. It is difficult to put a date on the work's composition. Chronologically, the last time reference made by Lactantius in the work was the death of Diocletian's daughter Valeria, reportedly 15 months after the death of the emperor Maximinus

² Barnes (2014, 115–117) himself concedes that he changed his mind several times about the place and year of the oration. Bleckmann (2007, 23) and Potter (2013, 223) also lean towards Nicomedia after 324. Edwards (2003, xxix), who translated the oration into English, concludes that it was delivered in Rome in 315. Pohlsander (2004, 42) cites a range between 317 and 324, but does not rule out 325 either.

³ Lactantius' *nomen gentilicium* (family name) is also spelt as Caelius in the manuscripts of his works (Barnes 2014, 221).

(*mort. pers.* 51). If Maximinus died between 23 July and 13 September 313,⁴ then Valeria would have died in the autumn of 314, meaning the work was written around 315. In fact, it quite likely comes from that specific year as there is no mention of the first war between Constantine and Licinius, which broke out in 316. Lactantius, moreover, speaks of Licinius commendably and not as an enemy of Constantine.⁵

Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265–339), where he was bishop from about 314, was an important contemporary figure in the Church and literature. He experienced both the Great Persecution and, subsequently, Constantine's conversion to Christianity. He met Constantine in person at the Council of Nicaea (325) and then several times later. Younger ecclesiastical writers were critical of his sympathy for Arianism, but could not deny his great merit as a man of letters. He wrote a number of works in Greek, including his *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia ecclesiastica*), in which he chronicled the history of early Christianity up to 324. He laboured over this work for several decades, returning to it repeatedly to continue or revise it. The original seven books were written shortly before 300. He added two more in 313: the eighth covered the persecution of Christians in the period spanning from Diocletian to Galerius (303–311), while the ninth dealt with persecution under Maximinus' reign, the conversion of Constantine, and the death of Maximinus (311–313). In 316, he concluded the work with a tenth book mapping the situation after 313. He returned to his *Ecclesiastical History* for a fourth time after 324 to add passages recounting Constantine's victory over Licinius (324). Finally, after 326, he ran one last revision of the work, deleting all mention of Constantine's son Crispus (who was executed that very year and suffered *damnatio memoriae*).⁶ The reams of documents quoted by Eusebius include letters, decrees, and speeches. Aside from its importance as a source, the work is significant in that it established a whole sub-genre

⁴ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 7.

⁵ See Winkelmann [2003, 11 (between 314 and 316)], Bleckmann [2007, 24 (*c.* 315)], Barnes [2010, 318 (no later than 315)]. Compare this to Cameron [2008, 90 (313 or 314)], Pohlsander [2004, 42 (*c.* 314)], Bardill [2012, 4 (between 313 and 315)].

⁶ These figures are cited by Barnes (1981, 148–163), Burgess (1997, 501–502), and Louth (1990, 111–113). For a slightly different view, see Winkelmann (2003: 6–8), Pohlsander (2004: 95). For more on Crispus' grim fate, see Chapter 9. For more on the concept of *damnatio memoriae*, see Chapter 3.

of historical literature: the “ecclesiastical history”, with numerous 5th-century writers subsequently building on the example set by Eusebius (see below).

Another of Eusebius’ prominent works is his *Life of Constantine* (*Vita Constantini*). Despite what the title may imply, it is not so much a run-of-the-mill biography of a Roman emperor (think Suetonius’ *The Twelve Caesars* or the *Historia Augusta*) as a eulogy to the late emperor, since Eusebius appears to have started this work immediately after the emperor’s death in 337. Despite running to four books, the work was probably still unfinished when Eusebius himself died in May 339. In the first two books, he broadly clung to what he had written in books eight to ten of the *Ecclesiastical History*, embellishing it with new material, while in the third and fourth books he concentrated on Constantine’s acts and deeds in 324–337.⁷

In Praise of Constantine (*Laus Constantini*) is quite obviously a panegyric. In fact, it is made up of two speeches. Eusebius delivered one in 335 to mark the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the other a year later in the imperial palace in Constantinople in celebration of Constantine’s three decades of rule (*tricennalia*).⁸

Eusebius’ other historical works include his *Chronicle* (*Chronicon*), which he began writing even earlier than his *Ecclesiastical History*. The initial version has not survived, but a later edition is still extant. Here, Eusebius traced world history from Abraham to 325, the year in which the subsequent second version was published. This concise, clear, and chronological account of all world events (that is to say, those known to Graeco-Roman civilisation) is an impressive and revolutionary achievement: no writer had ever embarked on a comprehensive history in this way before. Unlike Eusebius’ other works, the *Chronicle* has not been preserved in the original Greek. Instead, it exists in two abridged Syriac translations (from the seventh–eighth centuries), one Armenian translation (from the late 6th or early seventh century), and most importantly in Jerome’s Latin version from around 380 (see below).⁹

⁷ For a detailed interpretation of this work, see Cameron and Hall (1999, 1–53).

⁸ Bleckmann, “Sources for the History of Constantine”, 25. Eusebius himself mentions this speech in his *Life of Constantine*, noting that Constantine was very pleased with it and praised it at a subsequent banquet he held for the bishops (Euseb. *VC* IV, 46).

⁹ For more details, see Winkelmann (2003, 3–4).

On the whole, Eusebius is a reliable—indeed indispensable—source for the history of Constantine's reign, though his tendentiousness and boundless admiration for this emperor are glaring flaws that often drove him to suppress or distort reality.

Publius Optatianus Porfyrius was an eminent Roman senator who was banished by Constantine, though we know not why nor when, before being allowed to return in 325.¹⁰ The emperor is said to have pardoned Optatianus after being sent a collection of Latin poems that he had composed mostly in a panegyric style. This work, usually called simply the *Carmina*, has been preserved. It must have been written sometime before the beginning of 326 because it includes praise of Crispus and mentions Constantine's celebration of 20 years' reign (his *vicennalia*). Optatianus went on to have an even more illustrious career as an urban prefect of Rome.¹¹ He was probably a pagan.

Praxagoras of Athens published a two-book biography of the emperor Constantine in Greek in about 330. Although this work has not survived, it was read and synopsised by Photius (c. 820–890), the patriarch of Constantinople. The brevity of the synopsis—it would barely fill one side of A4—prevents us from determining whether the original text was intended as a true history of Constantine's reign or, instead, as a panegyric biography of the emperor. Whatever it was, it could not have covered the whole of Constantine's reign because it ended with the foundation of Constantinople. Photius wrote that Praxagoras was a pagan, that he wrote the biography at the age of 22, and that he authored several other works.¹²

Julius Firmicus Maternus, hailing from Sicily, wrote his work during Constantine's lifetime. A member of the senatorial class (a *vir clarissimus*), he was originally a pagan. Maternus wrote *Mathesis*, a work on astrology, in 334–337, but subsequently converted to Christianity and

¹⁰ Barnes (1975, 186) concluded that Optatianus spent 10 years in exile (315–325).

¹¹ In fact, he was an urban prefect (*praefectus urbi*) twice, first in 329 and then in 333. At some point in his life, he was also the *proconsul Achaiae*, but we do not know when. Barnes (1982, 119) places him in this official position before 306, while *PLRE I* (649) dates it to the years 325–329.

¹² See Barnes (2014, 195–197), who also presents an English translation of Photius' synopsis.

wrote an attack on paganism, *On the Error of Profane Religions (De errore profanarum religionum)*, in 343–348.¹³

The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* is another work that, arguably, should be included among the sources written towards the end of Constantine's reign or shortly after his death. Also known as the *Descriptio consulum*, this anonymous document is essentially an inventory of the consuls from 509 BCE to 468 CE. Many of the years, including most of Constantine's reign, are accompanied by historical annotations, most of which are no more than a line long. Although, admittedly, the text as a whole comes from a later period, it was compiled on an ongoing basis, hence Constantine's dates were written down in a contemporary hand, probably in late 337 or early 338.¹⁴

The *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, or *The Lineage of the Emperor Constantine*, is anonymous and difficult to date. A Latin work extant as a single manuscript, it is also known as *Anonymus Valesianus, pars prior* or *Excerpta Valesiana, pars prior*. It appears to be a biography of Constantine, though it is of such brevity that it is barely a few pages long.¹⁵ In it, the author dwells primarily on the military conflicts in the first half of Constantine's reign, but has little to say about the period after 324.

The timing of the work's creation is a puzzle for historians. Timothy Barnes points out that the *Origo* is independent of all other extant sources (the fact that it does not make the same mistakes as other sources is particularly noteworthy) and that it provides an accurate and insightful account of the early days of Constantine's reign in particular. In this light, he surmises, there is no reason to believe that it could not have been written shortly after Constantine's death, probably during the reign of Constantius II,¹⁶ and yet arguably the work could just as likely have been written at any time later in the fourth century and possibly as late as the nascent fifth century, considering that (among other things) there is a sentence towards the end that also appears in a historical work by Orosius (whom we will discuss in a moment): "However, from Constantine to the present day, all emperors have been Christians, with the exception of

¹³ See *PLRE I*, 567–568, Julius Firmicus Maternus.

¹⁴ Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 193. Bleckmann (2007, 22) says it was "shortly after the death of Constantine".

¹⁵ Nine pages in *Origo Constantini. Anonymus Valesianus, Teil I: Text und Kommentar*, ed. I. König, Trier 1987.

¹⁶ Barnes, *Jerome and the Origo*, 161; cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 60.

Julian, whose wicked life is said to have forsaken him as he was devising impious deeds". There are more such matching passages in Orosius and the *Origo*.¹⁷ The logical inference is that the *Origo* was written sometime after Julian's death, i.e. after 363, and that Orosius, who evidently wrote his work in 417, then "borrowed" some of its sentences.¹⁸ Of course, it could have been the other way around: Ingemar König claimed that the work drew on Jerome's *Chronicon* (see below for more on this author) and that the *Origo* was therefore probably written between Jerome and Orosius (i.e. c. 381–415), with a "Christian redactor" subsequently adding the above-mentioned passages from Orosius at some point after 417.¹⁹

While it is difficult to say anything about the author, except perhaps that he was likely a pagan,²⁰ what makes the *Origo* an undeniably remarkable work is that it is devoted entirely to the reign of Constantine²¹ and, despite its pagan perspective, is sympathetic towards the emperor. In this respect, the unknown author reminds us of the position adopted by another historian: Ammianus Marcellinus (see below), another pagan, was a soldier who viewed the emperors of the Constantinian dynasty—during whose reign he served in the army—in a generally positive light. It could be conjectured, then, that the *Origo*'s author was also a military man. After all, as mentioned above, he takes a keen interest in wars, and internal rather than external ones at that, which would suggest that he fought in them himself. Either way, the work is very knowledgeable on Constantine's rise to power, and the details it provides are now considered reliable and invaluable. The most plausible scenario thus seems to be the first of the possibilities outlined above, namely that the *Origo* was written very shortly after 337, and that the mystifying passages did not

¹⁷ *Origo* 6, 33 = Oros. *Hist.* VII, 28, 2 (*a Constantino autem omnes semper Christiani imperatores usque ad hodiernum diem creati sunt, excepto Juliano, quem impia ut aiunt machinantem exitialis vita deseruit*). Other identical passages: *Origo* 5, 20; 5, 29; 6, 33–35 (for all the corresponding references, see Oros. *Hist.* VII, 28).

¹⁸ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 3–4.

¹⁹ König, *Origo Constantini*, 26.

²⁰ Warmington, "Review of: *Origo Constantini*", 1990.

²¹ There is also a chance that it is simply an extract from a larger whole, as suggested by the very beginning of the work when it refers to the length of the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian as if this part of the text were preceded by an account of the first tetrarchy. This is ventured by Lieu and Montserrat (1996, 40) and König (1987, 5).

appear in it until sometime after 417, following the intervention of an unknown Christian editor who condensed the work and supplemented it with sentences from Orosius to lend it at least a tinge of Christian spirit.²²

Turning to the next work, not only are we in the dark about the author's name, the time the work was written, and its title, but we are not even in possession of the text itself. It was said to be a compendium of biographies of emperors, beginning with Augustus and ending with Constantine, and was written sometime after Constantine's death. No ancient writers cite or mention this work. However, attempts to prove its existence were made in 1883 by the German scholar Alexander Enmann, who realised that Aurelius Victor and Eutropius (see below) used the same phrases, referred to the same events, and made the same mistakes when writing about the emperors.²³ Moreover, he observed that while it looks like Victor copied Eutropius, his work actually predates that of Eutropius; conversely, Eutropius provides us with information that cannot be found in Victor, not to mention the fact that he does not replicate Victor's particular style or personal bias against certain emperors. This implies that the two of them must have drawn on a common source. Enmann also established that Victor and Eutropius were not the only ones to tap into this unknown source, which he dubbed the *Kaisergeschichte* (*KG*), i.e. *History of the Emperors*; another was the author of the *Historia Augusta* (see below). In the meantime, the list of works purportedly based on the *KG* has grown (e.g. Festus and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*)

²² Barnes' confidence is shared, for example, by Lieu and Montserrat (1996, 40), who write that "there is little doubt that the parallel passages are taken from Orosius' work by a later redactor to give what was a pagan work the much needed Christian garb, probably in the time of Constantius III [417–421]". Others sit on the fence: Bleckmann (2007, 26) concedes that the work may have been written shortly after 337, but acknowledges that it could just as well have been written towards the end of the fourth century; Drijvers (1992, 16) concludes that the work was composed in the early fifth century; Pohlsander (2004, 96) generally dates it to the fourth century. Cf. Winkelmann (2003, 15–17), who limits himself to a summary of the discussion so far.

²³ Both, for example, misinterpret the elevation of Constantius I and Galerius to the rank of *caesar* in 293 as Diocletian's reaction to Achilleus' revolt in Egypt, which did not occur until 297 (Aur. Vict. 39, 22–24; Eutr. IX, 22).

and the debate about when the *KG* was composed²⁴ and how it influenced later historical works²⁵ remains unabating.

Palladas, a pagan poet who lived in Alexandria, left us around 150 epigrams. The earlier consensus in historical scholarship was that he lived in the late fourth century. More recently, however, Kevin Wilkinson has tried to prove that he was actually active in the time of Constantine. Although many historians (e.g. Barnes) have accepted this hypothesis, it remains controversial.²⁶ Knowing when Palladas lived is fairly important because, in several of his epigrams, he rails against Christianity and laments the oppression of the pagans. This makes for a strong argument in the debate about Constantine's religious policy after 324.

Sextus Aurelius Victor wrote his brief work perhaps as early as 360, but more likely in the middle of 361.²⁷ Called the *Book of Emperors* (*Liber de Caesaribus*), it is a concise work that barely runs for 54 pages in translation.²⁸ Despite its brevity, it is precisely what the title suggests: a treatise on the life and reign of all Roman emperors up to Victor's time. The only way Victor could achieve this was by devoting a single paragraph to most of the emperors of the first to the third centuries; Constantine's biography, in stark contrast, takes up a full five pages. Victor, who must have been about 15 years old at the time of Constantine's death, wrote the work at the end of the reign of his son Constantius II, to whom he owed the beginning of his career as an official. However, it was the subsequent emperor, Julian (who also honoured him with a bronze statue),

²⁴ Burgess (1993a, 491) and Barnes (1970, 20) surmise that the *KG* was composed between 337 and c. 340, though Burgess later (1995, 128) sided with Enmann's original view that the work must have been written after 357. Bird (1973, 377; also 1994, xiii), too, leans towards this view.

²⁵ In certain cases, of course, there are question marks—see, for example, Burgess (1993a, 491), who gingerly includes the *Origo* among the sources inspired by the *KG*; Barnes (1989, 161) rejects this.

²⁶ Wilkinson, "Palladas and the Age of Constantine", Barnes, *Constantine*, 13–16. For arguments in favour of a late 4th-century date, see, for example, Benelli (2016).

²⁷ Burgess (1995, 111) and Bird (1994, xi) are inclined towards the year 361. Nixon (1991, 120) and Bonamente (2003, 92) allow for the fact that it may have been 360. Victor himself, while stating that he was writing in the twenty-third year of Constantius' reign (359/360), also remarks on the capture of Germanic kings by Julian, which is surely a reference to Chnodomar (357) and probably also to Vadomar (361).

²⁸ Sextus Aurelius Victor, and H. W. Bird, *Liber de Caesaribus* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994).

who appointed Victor to his first office of any significance. Later, in 388 or 389, Victor became the urban prefect of Rome.²⁹ This is all we know for certain about his life.

As already mentioned, one of the sources for Victor's *Book of Emperors* was the conjectured *Kaisergeschichte*; in fact, we can assume that this was his only source.³⁰ Victor regurgitated numerous errors from that work, while making many more himself. In its style, the *Book of Emperors* is heavily influenced by Sallust and, to a certain extent, Tacitus. Victor attempted to write in a dignified, even pathetic style, which was evidently why, given the choice, readers down the centuries preferred Eutropius.

Eutropius evidently wrote his historical work in 369,³¹ when (according to the prologue) he was serving as a *magister memoriae* under the emperor Valens. He claims to have taken part in Julian's Persian expedition in 363.³² Eutropius tells us nothing more about himself, and this is all that we can say of his life with any degree of certainty.³³ The problem is, what with Eutropius being quite a common name in late antiquity, we can never be sure if accounts of individuals so named from the mid-fourth century actually refer to our man Eutropius the historian.³⁴ We can assume, however, that, after several decades' service in various offices

²⁹ Victor was *consularis Pannoniae Secundae* from 361 to 364. His career (including information about the statue) is briefly recounted for us by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXI, 10, 6). For more on the role of the *praefectus urbis Romae*, see *PLRE I* (960, Sex. Aurelius Victor 13), which cites "c. 389", and Bird (1994, x), who dates Victor's appointment to 388. Rohrbacher (2003, 43) concludes that Victor held this office from late 388 to the summer of 389.

³⁰ Specifically, his only written source. Bird (1981, 463) stresses that Victor joined every other 4th-century historian in drawing on "a common pool of information about the past". While he does acknowledge the unifying influence of their rhetorical education, the oral tradition, and their schooling, he also notes that none of this changes the need to postulate a common source for Victor, Eutropius, and other authors.

³¹ Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, 49. Burgess (2001, 76) and Mouchová (2008, 9) date the work to the end of 369 or the beginning of 370; Bonamente (2003, 104) reckons it to be from 370 or 371.

³² Eutr. X, 16.

³³ We cannot even be sure that he did actually hold the title of *magister memoriae* (see the information on Festus on below).

³⁴ Burgess (2001, 77) points out, quite rightly, that modern historians have resorted to almost every known 4th-century Eutropius in their efforts to reconstruct the career of Eutropius the historian. For instance, Mouchová (2008, 12) and Bonamente (2003, 106) state that Eutropius was governor of the province of Cilicia in 367–369, yet this

at the courts of Constantius II, Julian and Jovian, our Eutropius was entrusted to govern the province of *Asia*, in the west of what is now Turkey, by the emperor Valens in 371 (or perhaps as early as 370).³⁵ Small though this province was, considerable prestige was accorded to the governorship here as it was the oldest Roman province in Asia (the prominence of this position is illustrated by the fact that it carried with it the title of *proconsul*, which was conferred on just three of the hundreds of governors across the empire).³⁶ If Eutropius the historian is the same man as Eutropius the governor, he may have landed this position as a reward for writing his history. On the other hand, Eutropius could just as well have written his work as a token of gratitude to the emperor Valens for appointing him to the office of *magister memoriae*.³⁷ What is not too much in doubt is that our Eutropius was the Eutropius who was the praetorian prefect of Illyricum in 380–381 and the Eutropius who was the consul of the East in 387 (and whose counterpart for the West was

detail of Eutropius' career is absent from Rohrbacher (2003, 49–51), Bird (1993, vii–xviii), and *PLRE I* (317, Eutropius 2), and in all probability this is a completely different Eutropius (see *PLRE I*, 318, Domitius Eutropius 5). Nor is it very likely that *Cilicia Secunda*'s provincial governor, with the title of *praeses*, would have been appointed to the position of *magister memoriae*, especially considering that our Eutropius (according to a later Byzantine author) was already a *magister epistularum*, i.e. the head of another distinguished court chancery, during Constantius II's reign. To be sure, advancement to the position of *magister memoriae* was tantamount to promotion (see, e.g., *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XIX, 6–13, and Clauss 1981, 16–18), but this would have made no sense if it had been preceded by Eutropius' service in a distant province. Moučková (2008, 12–13) also claims that our Eutropius was Theodosius I's *comes rerum privatarum* in 379, yet at that time this office was actually held by a certain Pancratius (see *PLRE I*, 664, Pancratius 4; cf. *ibid.*, 1063).

³⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus mentions an Eutropius in this position (XXIX, 1, 36) in 371, but it is rather curious that he simply names the individual and makes no mention of the fact that this was the historian whose works he himself had drawn on. As noted above, he made the effort with Aurelius Victor, telling us that he wrote a historical work, so why not here?

³⁶ In the *Notitia Dignitatum* (an anonymously compiled list of ranks), the *proconsul Asiae* is named first among all the provincial governors in the East and is even superior to the administrators of all dioceses.

³⁷ This is suggested by Rohrbacher (2003, 50), who also speculates that one of Eutropius' duties as *magister memoriae* may have been to write a historical work. Naturally, this is assuming Eutropius was genuinely a *magister memoriae* in the first place (see the information below on Festus).

none other than the 16-year-old emperor Valentinian II).³⁸ Judging by the nature of Eutropius' historical writings, he was most likely a pagan,³⁹ though this is about all that can be said of him.

Eutropius' work, dedicated to the emperor Valens, is called the *Breviarium* (the full title was probably *Breviarium ab urbe condita*) and covers all of Roman history up to the year of the emperor Jovian's death (364 CE). Although the nature of this work means that Eutropius is necessarily brief about Constantine, he does get a comparatively lengthy entry.⁴⁰ Eutropius appears to have relied on the *Kaisergeschichte* as his main, or perhaps only, source of information on the imperial era.⁴¹ His work soon became very popular and was translated into Greek several times—in around 380, then at the beginning of the sixth century, and ultimately in the eighth century.⁴² More than 80 manuscripts of Eutropius' work have survived (compared to the much less popular Aurelius Victor's two extant manuscripts). Orosius (see below) was just one of many late antique and early medieval authors who sourced information from the *Breviarium*. Paul the Deacon, for example, adopted it from beginning to end in his *Historia Romana*.

Very little is known about the historian named **Festus**. In one extant manuscript of his work, he is titled *vir clarissimus, magister memoriae*, but it is not certain which emperor he served in this capacity. Since Festus definitely wrote his work after 363, and probably around 369,⁴³ most speculation converges on the emperor Valens. Attempts to identify Festus essentially come up against the same problem as that described for Eutropius: it was a common name. Indeed, Festus was perhaps even more

³⁸ See, for example, Bonamente (2003, 104–106), Bird (1993, xvi–xvii); *PLRE I*, 317, Eutropius 2.

³⁹ Rohrbacher (2003, 51) says he was “almost certainly pagan”; *PLRE I* 317, Eutropius 2, is more cautious (“apparently a pagan”).

⁴⁰ Eutr. X, 2–8.

⁴¹ Bird, *Eutropius: Breviarium*, xlviii.

⁴² Bonamente, “Minor Latin Historians of the Fourth Century A.D.,” 103–104; Bird, *Eutropius: Breviarium*, lv.

⁴³ Burgess, *On the Date of Kaisergeschichte*, 112 (“c. 369”). Cf. Burgess, *Eutropius V. C. “Magister memoriae”?*, 77 (winter 369/370); Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, 57 (“369 or 370”). The fact of the matter is that, in the last sentence of his work, Festus alludes to the emperor's victory over the Goths, which is usually interpreted as Valens' victory over the Goths in 369.

prevalent than Eutropius in the fourth century, and our author could have been the same Festus—mentioned by numerous ancient authors (including Ammianus Marcellinus)—who was *consularis Syriae* (in 365 or 368) and *proconsul Asiae* (in 372–378).⁴⁴ However, doubt has been cast repeatedly on whether this is our man.⁴⁵ Festus' position as *magister memoriae* is equally doubtful. If Eutropius and Festus really did write their works in 369, or 370, and both for the emperor Valens, then obviously the two of them could not have held this position at the same time. Richard W. Burgess, after going through the extant manuscripts of Eutropius and Festus with a fine toothcomb, concluded that this office was probably held by Festus.⁴⁶ Festus' work is aptly called the *Breviarium*. It is highly condensed, and only one of its thirty chapters mentions Constantine.

The emperor Flavius Claudius **Julianus**, or Julian, (born probably in 331⁴⁷; died on 26 June 363) was a ruler who indulged in writing and left us a number of works that provide important information on the Constantinian dynasty, of which he himself was a member. His satirical work *Caesares*,⁴⁸ in which Constantine appears as one of the contestants, is particularly important, though Julian's orations and other writings are also significant.

As mentioned above, the eminent ecclesiastical scholar **Jerome** (Hieronimus) authored the Latin translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (*Chronicon*). In point of fact, he only translated the second part, known as the *Chronological Canons*. The use of a parchment codex (instead of the traditional papyrus scrolls) meant that events could be clearly ordered on the individual leaves (of which Jerome required 332) and that tables, or canons, could be created. Jerome, whose translation dates to 380 or

⁴⁴ This is the view taken by *PLRE I* (334–335, Festus 3), where the reader will find similarities in his official career. See *Amm. Marc.* XXIX, 2, 22–28.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Grote (2011, 704). This is explored in more detail in Mouchová (2008, 23–32).

⁴⁶ Burgess, *Eutropius V. C. "Magister memoriae"?* It is startling, to say the least, that Eutropius and Festus were both not only *magistri memoriae*, but also subsequently proconsuls of Asia one after the other. These are the reasons why some scholars are very hesitant when it comes to identifying Festus. Baldwin (1978, 205), for example, observes that "There can be no sure identification of the author of the *Breviarium*".

⁴⁷ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 22.

⁴⁸ This is the conventional title of this short work. In its original Greek, it is called *Συμπόσιον ἢ Κρόνια* (*Symposium or Kronia*).

381,⁴⁹ was faithful to the Greek original at first, but as he progressed he began to add information from other sources. The last part, covering 325–378, is actually his own contribution, written to extend Eusebius’ work.

Ammianus Marcellinus was unquestionably “the greatest Latin historian of the fourth century”.⁵⁰ Born “about 330 into the local aristocracy of one of the cities of Roman Syria or Phoenicia”,⁵¹ he served in the *protectores domestici* (see Chapter 3 for more on this term) and appears in his own work *Res gestae*, in which he writes about himself in the first person when describing the events of 354–359 and 363. Shortly after 380, Ammianus evidently settled in Rome,⁵² where he probably wrote his historical work by 391.⁵³ The year of his death is unknown. He was undoubtedly a pagan.⁵⁴

Although his mother tongue was Greek (he describes himself as a Greek), he wrote *Res gestae* in Latin. In this work, he described the history of the years 96–378 CE. However, the work has not survived in its entirety. Although the extant part of the work deals with the years 353–378 CE, it is also surprisingly relevant to the third century, to the time of the tetrarchy and to the reign of Constantine, since Ammianus is prone to retrospective digression. For example, he mentions the sack of Philippopolis in 250 (or 251) and the Gothic invasion of 269,⁵⁵ recounts Diocletian’s dissatisfaction with the *caesar* Galerius,⁵⁶ and occasionally comments on Constantine⁵⁷; at one point he even refers to his earlier

⁴⁹ Burgess, *On the Date of Kaisergeschichte*, 112.

⁵⁰ Sabbah, “Ammianus Marcellinus”, 43.

⁵¹ This is how Barnes (1998, 1) contemplates where Ammianus was born. Rohrbacher (2003, 14) and Sabbah (2003, 50–52) are almost sure that it was Antioch; Syme (1968, 5) and Rosen (1982, 24) were quite certain of this.

⁵² Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*, 2; Sabbah, “Ammianus Marcellinus”, 53; Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, 20.

⁵³ Liebeschuetz, “Pagan Historiography”, 188; Kulikowski, “Marius Maximus in Ammianus”, 244. Cf. Syme (1968, 6), who argued that the work was completed by 397.

⁵⁴ Sabbah, “Ammianus Marcellinus”, 66. Liebeschuetz (2003, 190) is convinced of this.

⁵⁵ Amm. Marc. XXXI, 5, 15 and 17; for more on these two episodes and other examples, see Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ Amm. Marc. XIV, 11, 10; see Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Amm. Marc. XIV, 1, 2; XV, 5, 33 et al.

(and doubtless extensive) account of Constantine's preparations for war against Persia in the last years of the emperor's life.⁵⁸

The *Chronograph of 354* (*Chronographus anni CCCLIII*) is not so much a chronicle as a collection of various documents compiled by one **Furius Dionysius Filocalus**. The author's name would have been lost to us had he not signed the title page when dedicating his work to a wealthy Roman aristocrat called **Valentinus** in 354 (or, more likely, at the end of 353). The dedication and the content of the work suggest that both of these men were Christians; other than that, our knowledge of them is scant. This dedicatory work was a richly illustrated codex (by all accounts, this was the first time that full-page illustrations had appeared in European literature) that contained a calendar recording all the important events celebrated in Rome in 354, including the birthdays of the emperors (*natales Caesarum*). The work also lists the consuls, urban prefects, and bishops of Rome, and provides much other useful information. It could therefore be likened to a kind of almanac.⁵⁹

The Calendar of Filocalus was probably used as a source by **Polemius Silvius**, a native of south-eastern Gaul who wrote his *Laterculus* in 449. This is another calendar enriched with various lists, such as emperors and Roman provinces.⁶⁰

The *Historia Augusta* (*HA*), a work not entitled as such until the early seventeenth century, is a collection of biographies of the Roman emperors from Hadrian to Carinus. In other words, it covers the years 117–285, though omits the biographies of the emperors who ruled from 244 to 253. If we are to believe the work itself, six different authors were involved in the creation of the biographies, four of whom lived during the reign of Diocletian and two during the reign of Constantine. However, in 1889, the great German scholar Hermann Dessau theorised that the work was written by a single author at the end of the fourth century. That hypothesis remains generally accepted to this day.⁶¹ Scholars concur

⁵⁸ Amm. Marc. XXV, 4, 23 (*non Julianum sed Constantinum ardores Parthicos succendisse... ut dudum rettulimus plene*).

⁵⁹ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, 3–4. For more information on Filocalus and attempts to match the dedicatee Valentinus with known bearers of this name, see *Ibid.*, 201–205.

⁶⁰ Zecchini, "Latin Historiography", 340.

⁶¹ Most scholars today surmise that the *HA* was written in the late fourth century. See, for example, Burgess (1995, 111), Kulikowski [2007, 244 ("c. 395–399")], Rohrbacher [2016, 8 (after 390)], Birley [2003, 133 (between 395 and 405)], and Cameron [2011,

that it is an extremely unreliable source that must be used with the utmost caution.⁶² Readers are free to make up their own minds as the work has been translated by David Magie.⁶³ One of the biographies of the 3rd-century emperors is that of Claudius, supposedly an ancestor of Constantine (see Appendix A).

The *Epitome de Caesaribus*—not its original title—is an anonymous and relatively short work (it would only take up about 18 pages of a modern book) covering the emperorships up to Theodosius I, after whose death it was written.⁶⁴ In the past it has sometimes—quite wrongly—been attributed to Sextus Aurelius Victor, on whose *Book of Emperors* it plainly draws. Victor, however, is by no means its only source. Timothy Barnes⁶⁵ lists five or six sources purportedly mined by the author of the *Epitome*: for the period from Augustus to Domitian (chapters 1–11), the sources were primarily the *Kaisergeschichte* (*KG*) and Aurelius Victor; from Nerva to Elagabalus (chapters 12–23), again the *KG*, along with Eutropius and Marius Maximus (see below); for the period from Severus Alexander to Carus (chapters 24–38), again the *KG* and Eutropius; for the period from Diocletian to Valens (chapters 39–46)—i.e. including the Constantinian dynasty—Barnes asserts that the sources were Eunapius and perhaps also Ammianus Marcellinus. For the last two chapters (47 and 48), dealing with Gratian and Theodosius, not even Barnes has identified a source.

The aforementioned **Marius Maximus** was, it would appear, a peddler of imperial piquancy who was intent on outdoing his role model Suetonius (but then met his match in the author of the *Historia Augusta*). Marius Maximus (c. 160 CE–c. 230 CE) was a distinguished senator, governor, and general who held a number of important official posts during the reign of Commodus and the Severan dynasty. His literary work

745 (between 375 and 380)]. The debate has been steered in this direction primarily by Ronald Syme (e.g. 1968, 72–79; 1983, 12–30) and Timothy D. Barnes (1978, 98–107).

⁶² Cameron (2011, 781) observes that “The author of the HA was a frivolous, ignorant person with no agenda worthy of the name at all”; Browning (1982, 727) is resigned to the fact that “The historian must make use of it, but only with extreme circumspection and caution”.

⁶³ *Historia Augusta*, vols. I–III, trans. by David Magie, Harvard 1921, 1924 and 1932.

⁶⁴ Probably sometime between 395 and 408, as it does not mention Arcadius’ death. Barnes, “Epitome de Caesaribus”, 27; Bonamente, “Minor Latin Historians of the Fourth Century A.D.”, 100.

⁶⁵ Barnes, “The Epitome de Caesaribus and Its Sources”, 258–268.

is unfortunately not extant, but we know that it followed Suetonius not only in genre, but also chronologically, and thus covered the emperors reigning after Domitian, specifically from Nerva to Elagabalus (96–222 CE). Both the author of the *Historia Augusta* (who makes copious direct references to Marius Maximus) and, in all probability, Ammianus Marcellinus (although the latter was rather scornful of him)⁶⁶ made use of Maximus' work.

Tyrannius **Rufinus**, also known as Rufinus of Aquileia, was a Western ecclesiastical writer of the early fifth century who, in addition to his own oeuvre, translated Greek works into Latin. In around 403, he translated Eusebius' entire *Ecclesiastical History* into Latin and, by adding two more books to the original ten, extended Eusebius' account to 395.

During the fifth century, several further continuations of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* were written. These were by **Socrates**, **Sozomen**, and **Theodoret**, each of whom wrote their own *Ecclesiastical History* (in Greek). Although they essentially began with the year 324, they occasionally added to or corrected the last parts of Eusebius' writings. The first of these three ended his history with the year 439, the second with 442, and the last with 429. What is particularly important for our purposes is the part of their writings these authors devoted to the reign of Constantine: Socrates covers it in the first of his seven books, Sozomen in the first two books of nine, and Theodoret in the first of five books.

Another of the ecclesiastical historians who followed in Eusebius' footsteps was **Philostorgius**, who wrote his *Church History* in the 430s and took his account up to the year 425. He deals with Constantine's reign in the first two books (out of a total of twelve). Philostorgius differs from his Orthodox colleagues in one important respect: he was an Arian and in his works he defends this offshoot of Christianity, which had been rejected at the Council of Nicaea in 325. This also explains why his work has survived only in part and only thanks to a fortuitous turn of events at that: in the

⁶⁶ When mentioning the literary taste of the aristocracy in Rome, see Amm. Marc. XXVIII, 4, 14. "Some of them hate learning as they do poison, and read with attentive care only Juvenal and Marius Maximus, in their boundless idleness handling no other books than these". For Marius Maximus' influence on Ammianus, see Kulikowski (2007).

ninth century, Photius I, the patriarch of Constantinople, took extensive extracts from it, and it is these that are extant.⁶⁷

Paulus **Orosius** was born between 375 and 385 in Hispania, probably in *Gallaecia* (present-day Galicia) in north-western Spain, and perhaps, specifically, in the city of Bracara (now Braga).⁶⁸ His contemporaries referred to him simply as Orosius; the first person to use the full name Paulus Orosius is Jordanes (*Get.* 58). In 409, he lived through the invasion of Hispania by the Vandals, Alans, and Suebi, and a year later learned that the Goths had sacked Rome. Pagan intellectuals attributed this event to the wrath of the gods, who had been deposed by the false god of the Christians. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* was written in response, as was—at Augustine's suggestion⁶⁹—Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* (*Historiae adversus paganos*). Although the seven-book work otherwise provides a very comprehensive introduction to world history, it glosses over the period of the third century, the tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine in just a couple of dozen pages.⁷⁰ Not to mention the fact that Orosius quite rigidly sticks to Eutropius' *Breviarium* and Jerome's *Chronicle*, as well as Rufinus and other sources (which he condenses), and makes frequent errors in chronology.

On the other hand, the passage which Orosius incorporated into his work after mentioning Constantine's usurpation in Britain in 306 is entirely his own. For Orosius, the reign of this emperor—who ended the persecution of Christians for good and himself embraced the Christian faith—is a major turning point in history (he tactfully overlooks Constantine's inclination towards Arianism in his twilight years). In this passage, the author sums up the whole epoch of persecution and compares the ten

⁶⁷ They run for about 150 pages in English translation, of which about 30 are evidently the first two books devoted to the reign of Constantine; see Philostorgius, *Church History. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Philip R. Amidon*, S. J., Atlanta 2007.

⁶⁸ Different historians put different dates on his year of birth: Rohrbacher [2003, 135 (around 375)], Zecchini [2003, 319 (375–380)], Mouchová [2018, 6 (380–385)], Fear [2010, 2 (c. 385)]. Orosius' place of birth and the region he was from are also unresolved.

⁶⁹ For more on the debate surrounding other details known about Orosius' life, along with issues related to his work's purpose, character, and structure, the time it was written, and the response it generated, see Fear (2010, 1–25), Zecchini (2003, 319–329), Rohrbacher (2003, 135–149), and Mouchová [2018, 5–30].

⁷⁰ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 16–28.

periods of persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire (i.e. how many he counted) to the ten plagues of Egypt.⁷¹

Before we move on to the Byzantine sources, we should briefly mention two anonymous works that are of a broadly technical character. The first is the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a list of ranks, offices, and military units in the late Roman Empire, which paints a fairly accurate picture of the civil and military imperial administration at the end of the fourth century (for the Eastern Roman Empire) and the beginning of the fifth century (for the Western part).⁷² Following the administrative reforms under the tetrarchy and during Constantine's reign, there was no radical change in the empire's administration until the turn of the fifth century, so this list is an important source for understanding the reforms that were carried out, and many of its entries are also relevant to the time of Constantine.

The anonymous *De rebus bellicis* was probably written around 368⁷³ to propose useful reforms of the imperial administration, taxes, currency and judiciary; it also includes a description of war machines.

The work of the Greek writer **Zosimus** is an important source for Constantine's time and the third century. First, however, we need to mention two other Greek writers closely related to Zosimus. Publius Herennius **Dexippus** came from a respected wealthy Athenian family and held prominent offices in Athens. His *Chronicle* and *Scythica* covered the whole of history up to the end of the reign of the emperor Claudius Gothicus (270). Although only fragments of them survive in later authors, we are indebted to them for providing a lot of important information on the third century. **Eunapius** of Sardis was born in 347 or 348 and died after 404.⁷⁴ A professional rhetorician interested in Neoplatonism, he wrote two works. While the biographical *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* is extant in its entirety, his *Historical Memoirs* was not so fortunate. Its fourteen books covered the years from 270 to 404 (ending with the death of the empress Eudoxia in that year) and centred on the reign

⁷¹ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 26–27. Jerome, by contrast, is not so coy about tackling Constantine's swing towards Arianism in his *Chronicle* (which is Orosius' source). For more on the various stages of the persecution of Christians, see Chapter 3.

⁷² Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 40.

⁷³ Depeyrot, "Economy and Society", 238; Cameron, "The Reign of Constantine", 103.

⁷⁴ Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, 65.

of the emperor Julian (361–363), whom Eunapius admired immensely. This work has survived in about a hundred fragments, virtually none of which mentions Constantine or the third century. Both Eunapius' works are written from a pagan point of view and are anti-Christian and polemical.⁷⁵ This is why the *Suda*, the 10th-century Byzantine encyclopaedia, asserted that Eunapius had written a lot of bunk about Constantine in his work.

Which brings us back to **Zosimus**, who, mercifully, lifted a large chunk of Eunapius' text for his six-book *New History*. This did not escape Photius, who had the following to say about Zosimus in his 9th-century *Bibliotheca*: "It could be argued that he did not write a history, but copied that of Eunapius". After comparing Zosimus' text and Eunapius' fragments, we cannot but agree with him.⁷⁶ Even so, Zosimus must have reduced the original text considerably because he boiled down Eunapius' fourteen books to about four (Zos. I, 47–V, 25). Once he had made it past 404, the year in which Eunapius' *Historical Memoirs* ends, Zosimus had to turn elsewhere, and alighted upon the work of another Greek writer, Olympiodorus (Zos. V, 26–VI, 13). Zosimus' history stops abruptly midway through an account of the events of 410 (though he did not get as far as Alaric's sacking of Rome in that year). As to the beginning of *New History* (Zos. I, 1–46), we cannot be sure whether the author was relying here on the work of Eunapius or of Dexippus.⁷⁷ This means that Zosimus transcribed (and heavily abridged) the third century, the period of the tetrarchy, and the time of Constantine from the text written by Eunapius (or Dexippus). While the third century is described quite sparingly (Zos. I, 7–73), the years 305–337 come in for greater scrutiny (Zos. II, 9–39). Unfortunately, there is a gap in the only extant manuscript, so the period of the first tetrarchy is missing completely. All that has been passed on of Zosimus' actual person is what Photius wrote about him: that he was an *advocatus fisci*, had the title of *comes*, and

⁷⁵ Liebeschuetz, "Pagan Historiography", 177.

⁷⁶ Liebeschuetz, "Pagan Historiography", 178; Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, 65.

⁷⁷ Bleckmann (1992, 20) speculates that Dexippus may have been used as a source by Zosimus, the *Epitome*, the *HA*, and Zonaras. Ridley (1972, 285) believes this to be true. Prchlik (2016, 174 and 189–190), on the other hand, sums up arguments supporting the hypothesis that the only source used by Zosimus in his first book was Eunapius.

was a pagan. Though Photius offers no chronological dates, Zosimus is commonly assumed to have been active in the early sixth century.⁷⁸

The Byzantine historian **Peter the Patrician** lived during the reign of the emperor Justinian. His Greek work covering Roman history from the Second Triumvirate to the time of the emperor Julian has not survived. However, the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus had extensive extracts taken from it in the tenth century, and the resulting fragments have provided a particularly useful description of the events surrounding the 3rd-century barbarian invasions.⁷⁹

During Justinian's reign, there was also a Latin author, **Jordanes**, who wrote *Getica*, an account of Gothic history, in 551, and *Romana*, a Roman history, in 552. Both works are heavily derivative: Jordanes sourced his information on the third century, the tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine primarily from Orosius and Jerome's *Chronicle*, as well as Eutropius, Festus, Dexippus and, indirectly, the *HA*. Nevertheless, *Getica* contains passages that do not come from any known source.⁸⁰ Generally speaking, *Getica* is valued for its description of the barbarian invasions in the third century, but otherwise it is highly selective and ignores many emperors (especially all the emperors between Gallienus and Diocletian). *Romana*, on the other hand, leaves no one out, but is very frugal in its descriptions, not to mention the fact that there is a gap from 303 to 361 CE.

John Malalas (491–578) is the author of an eighteen-book *Chronographia* describing world history up to the end of Justinian's reign. The twelfth book traces the history of the empire from Commodus to the early days of Constantine's reign, and the thirteenth book deals directly with Constantine, the rest of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century. Malalas' work is most valuable for its depiction of the sixth century, but elsewhere it can be chronologically or otherwise confused in its treatment of earlier periods (e.g. Malalas describes the first tetrarchy as a succession of four emperors rather than a division of power). Taken as a whole, it nevertheless sheds light on some interesting and important details.

⁷⁸ Bleckmann, "Sources for the History of Constantine", 28; Ridley, "Zosimus the Historian", 280.

⁷⁹ For further details, see Banchich (2015, 1–12).

⁸⁰ For example, the story of Decius' ineptitude (*Get.* 90) and Aemilian's plundering of Moesia (*Get.* 105). See Chapter 3.

George Syncellus (who died probably in 811) wrote his *Extract of Chronography* as a typical monastic chronicle, in which he arranges, in order, events from the creation of the world to the reign of the emperor Diocletian. Syncellus is an important source for the third century (for example, he is one of the Byzantine authors who preserved fragments of Dexippus for us). Syncellus was followed by **Theophanes** the Confessor (752–818), whose *Chronographia* covers the years from 284 to 818.

A very late source is the work of the Byzantine author known as **Zonaras**, who lived at the turn of the twelfth century. His *Extracts of History*, a historical work consisting of eighteen books, describes the history of the world from the creation to his own time. Zonaras drew on a wealth of sources, many of which are no longer extant, and reproduced their text quite faithfully.⁸¹ The late antiquity period stands out from the vast span of his work as being extraordinarily detailed, with Zonaras devoting a full 15 pages to the reign of the emperor Constantine.

POSTSCRIPT: SOURCES FOR THE PERIOD 193–293 CE

Of course, there are many sources covering the period of the tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine (e.g. Eutropius and the *Epitome*) that also touch on the third century, but here I mention only the two most frequently cited authors who lived in that century. **Cassius Dio** was a Roman senator whose mother tongue was Greek. He lived in about 155–235, i.e. at the time of the emperors of the Severan dynasty. His *Roman History* was an ambitious work covering all of Roman history up to the year 229. Of the original eighty books, however, only about a third are extant; brief extracts of the rest have survived in the works of later Byzantine authors. **Herodian**, another historian who wrote in Greek, probably lived between 180 and 260. He is the author of a brief history of the Roman Empire covering the years from 180 to 238, the title of which can be translated as *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus Aurelius*.

Post-script: for the sake of completeness, it should be noted that very marginal use has also been made of early Principate authors such as Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, and Livy and his *History of Rome* (*Ab urbe condita libri*). There is no need to go into detail here about these authors, whose works, for the most part, are mentioned only once.

⁸¹ For a discussion on Zonaras' sources, see Banchich and Lane (2009, 8–9).

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The Illyrian Emperors

When the emperor Commodus was strangled in his palace in Rome on 31 December 192,¹ the conspirators—the praetorian prefect² Laetus among them—decided that he would be succeeded by Publius Helvius Pertinax. Though born the son of a freedman, Pertinax had risen to prefect of the city of Rome after a long career in public service and the military. He was quite likely personally involved in the conspiracy. Laetus, who evidently had no designs on the imperial title himself, secured the support of the praetorians before presenting the new emperor to the senate,³ which

¹ For readers wondering why Commodus was assassinated and what his reign was like, I recommend the synopsis provided by Potter (2004, 85–93). Ando (2012, 18) calls this assassination “a desperate response to Commodus’ apparent descent into total madness”.

² Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 87. The high office of praetorian prefect (*praefectus praetorio*) was typically held by two men at a time, and less frequently by a single individual (for more on this, see Chapter 3). During the Principate, their duties included commanding the praetorian guard, which camped in barracks (*castra praetoria*) on the fringes of Rome. From the very dawn of the empire, however, they were also entrusted with other tasks and, over time, they became the emperor’s chief aides in the imperial administration. Besides the praetorians (for more on whom see below), the emperor had also been guarded since Trajan’s reign by the *equites singulares Augusti*, an elite thousand-man cavalry guard stationed in Rome. See Goldsworthy (2009, 444); Spidel (2005, 25).

³ Laetus himself, as a mere *eques* (for more on this concept, see below), was not in a position to even entertain the idea of becoming emperor. The opportune moment for a

convened in all haste on 1 January and raised not the slightest objection to the appointment. Quite the contrary, the historian Cassius Dio, who was present at the session as a senator, has preserved for us in his work his colleagues' delight as they rejoiced at the end of Commodus' reign of terror.⁴ If anyone raised objections, it was the candidate himself, refusing the emperorship in an act known as *refutatio imperii*. We will examine this phenomenon later, as Constantine was another of the emperors who engaged in this show of reluctance. For the moment, suffice it to say that this act was nothing out of the ordinary in the history of the Roman Empire and that, as David Potter rightly points out, Pertinax was essentially signalling his readiness to the senate. A good man does not actively aspire to power, but waits until he is called; however, if power is conferred on him by the praetorians or the army, it is polite to demur until it is offered by the senate (Map 3.1).⁵

The fact that everyone had seemed to agree on Pertinax's appointment did not deter the praetorians from assassinating him on 28 March of the same year. The reasons for this are not entirely clear—it may have been prompted by concerns that the new emperor was overly obdurate or by uneasiness over his acts of austerity, or perhaps it was a way of protesting Commodus' death; it is even possible that the guard had not been convinced of any of the candidates in the first place.⁶ The praetorian prefect Laetus personally orchestrated the assassination and was then once again tasked with choosing a new emperor, preferably someone more malleable than Pertinax. The urban prefect Flavius Sulpicianus, Pertinax's father-in-law, came of his own accord to the praetorian camp to pitch a financial offer, but Didius Julianus, who had been a colleague of Pertinax in the consulship in 175, made the praetorians an even more tempting proposition and eventually bought their loyalty and imperial power for 25,000 *sestertii* each.⁷ However, because of his unpopularity among the people and the senate, Didius Julianus had to place all his

member of the equestrian order, rather than a senator, to become emperor would have to wait until 217 (see below). Pertinax promised 12,000 *sestertii* (for more on this term, see below) apiece to the praetorians.

⁴ Dio LXXIII, 1.

⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 94.

⁶ Ando, *Imperial Rome AD 193 to 284*, 20.

⁷ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 97; Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 95. Goldsworthy (2009, 58) contemplates that the praetorians may have rejected Sulpicianus because, as



Map 3.1 Map of provinces, important cities, and legionary bases in the 3rd-century Roman Empire. Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission

trust in the fickle praetorian guard. Commanders of legions in various parts of the empire realised there was a window of opportunity here. On 9 April, in all probability straight after news of Pertinax's assassination had reached the provinces, Septimius Severus was proclaimed emperor in Carnuntum (now Petronell-Carnuntum, Austria); elsewhere, the legions in Syria had acclaimed Pescennius Niger emperor perhaps a little earlier (in late March), and—evidently sometime later—those in Britain put their weight behind Clodius Albinus. The chronology of these events, however, is uncertain.⁸ Usurpations of imperial power had once been rare (best known are the events of 68–69, when Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian made successive attempts to seize and hold on to supreme power), but by the third century they were so prevalent as to be more or less the norm. The events of 193 offered a foretaste of this.

a relative of Pertinax, he might seek revenge. Assuming the guard had 7,200 men—9 cohorts of 800 men each (ibid., 59)—this would have amounted to 180 million *sestertii*!

⁸ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 28.

This time, the battle for the title of emperor was won by Lucius Septimius Severus, born in the African city of Leptis Magna (on the coast of present-day Libya, about 130 km east of Tripoli). Although he certainly came from a Roman family, he spoke fluent Punic as well as Latin and may have had difficulty pronouncing certain Latin consonants.⁹ Like his rivals, he had had a successful public career, which included commanding a legion in Syria (when Pertinax was governor of Syria). On the recommendation of the aforementioned praetorian prefect Laetus, he was rather surprisingly made governor of Upper Pannonia (*Pannonia Superior*) in the summer of 191 and suddenly found himself in command of three legions that were stationed roughly between present-day Vienna and Budapest, but if necessary could be dispatched to Italy in haste.¹⁰ And that is exactly what Severus did after his act of usurpation. He secured the support of the neighbouring governors, pacified Clodius Albinus for the time being by granting him the rank of *caesar* (implying that he would be Severus' successor),¹¹ snubbed Pescennius Niger, who had received the backing of Asia Minor in the meantime, and quickly covered the 683 Roman miles between Carnuntum and Rome. Severus entered Rome unopposed shortly after Didius Julianus had been killed by his own men on 1 June 193. One of his first acts was to disband the praetorian guard and form a new guard with soldiers from his Danubian legions. He increased the number of soldiers in the unswervingly loyal elite cavalry guard (*equites singulares Augusti*) to 2,000.¹² And, to make a show of the fact that he was coming to avenge Pertinax and preserve his legacy, he added the name Pertinax to his own. Severus subsequently sent a legion to Africa to secure this important province. Not long after, he left Rome and

⁹ Birley (2002, 35) notes that “there is a chance that Septimius pronounced his own names in a manner resembling Sheptimiush Sheverush”.

¹⁰ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 83.

¹¹ From the early days of the Principate, the title of *augustus* was essentially reserved for the reigning emperor, while that of *caesar* was conferred on the predestined successor or co-ruler (Kienast, 1996, 24–25). Once elevated to *augustus*, emperors also retained the title of *caesar*. This practice was introduced by Augustus when, in 17 BCE, he conferred the title of *caesar* on his grandsons Gaius and Lucius, whom he also adopted and predestined to succeed him. Naturally, when the titles *caesar* or *augustus* are meant as part of a name, they are capitalised. For our purposes, they are used in a technical sense (for a lower- and higher-ranking emperor), hence the lower-case initial letter.

¹² Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, 45.

headed East.¹³ Relatively soon, in the autumn, he launched a successful attack against Niger, who had made Byzantium his headquarters. Pescennius retreated to Nicaea, and it was outside this city that, probably in December, he suffered a second defeat. As his men began to desert him, other cities also fell. Early in 194, Severus secured Egypt. Towards the end of April, the decisive Battle of Issus in southern Asia Minor was fought.¹⁴ Pescennius Niger, vanquished, initially survived the battle by fleeing to Antioch, but was killed soon afterwards. Severus now had only two concerns in the East. First, with the garrison of Byzantium refusing to capitulate (despite being shown Niger's severed head), the city had to be besieged. Secondly, many of Niger's people had fled across the Euphrates to northern Mesopotamia, where various minor rulers had previously voiced their support for him.¹⁵ Any incursion beyond the Euphrates, however, would escalate into a war with the powerful Parthian Empire, the Romans' only real rival. Severus decided the circumstances were ripe to invade Mesopotamia in the spring of 195, giving him the opportunity to cover himself in glory as a warrior, establish his own supremacy, and consolidate the empire's position in the East. He succeeded in annexing Osroene—a region roughly equivalent to Syrian Kurdistan, stretching from the Upper Euphrates to the Tigris—and creating a new province there.¹⁶ Severus also divided Syria into the two smaller provinces of *Syria Coele* in the north and *Syria Phoenice* in the south.

In the meantime, in 195 Clodius Albinus, deciding that he deserved a more prominent role in politics than Severus had assigned to him, proclaimed himself *augustus*¹⁷ and set sail for Gaul with his army. Severus, learning that Byzantium had finally been conquered after a two-year siege, was now able to leave the East for a while. He made his elder son Caracalla *caesar* in place of Clodius Albinus and declared himself the adopted son of Marcus Aurelius and brother of Commodus (*divi Marci pii filius*,

¹³ Where I use the capitalised term “East”, I am referring to the eastern half of the empire, i.e. the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Syro-Palestinian region, and Egypt. Likewise, the “West” covers the area of Italy, Gaul, Britain, and Hispania.

¹⁴ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 113. Potter (2004, 104) says May.

¹⁵ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 115.

¹⁶ The centre of this new province appears to have been Carrhae (Birley, 2002, 132).

¹⁷ Southern (2004, 34–35) dates this act to late 195 or early 196.

divi Commodi frater).¹⁸ The motivation behind this move, like his earlier subscription to Pertinax’s legacy, was to reinforce his claim to the emperorship and to establish a dynasty. Cassius Dio noted that a provincial governor sarcastically congratulated the emperor on his title of “son of the pious Marcus” with the words, “Congratulations, emperor – you have found your father at last” (alluding to the political insignificance of Severus’ own father).¹⁹

After a brief sojourn in Rome, Severus set off to confront Albinus. With an army vastly outnumbering his rival’s, Severus comprehensively defeated Clodius Albinus at Lugdunum (present-day Lyon, France) on 19 February 197, after which Albinus committed suicide.²⁰ Severus again returned to Rome and formed three new legions (bringing the total number to 33) as part of his plans for a new Eastern campaign.²¹ This made him the first emperor since Domitian to substantially increase his number of troops. He stationed one of these legions (*II Parthica*) in Alba, Italy (13 miles south of Rome, on the Appian Way). This legion, together with the new praetorian guard, ensured that he now had enough loyal soldiers in Italy to keep his regime afloat. He took the remaining two legions (*I Parthica* and *III Parthica*) with him to the East, where they subsequently remained permanently stationed.²²

¹⁸ Severus also renamed his elder son to reflect this: Septimius Bassianus became Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Caesar. From 211, Caracalla’s final formal name was a mix of the names of adoptive emperors from the previous century and his father’s name: *Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Pius Augustus*. Indeed, he may be known to posterity as the emperor Caracalla, but this was actually only an unofficial nickname derived from a short Gallic hooded tunic that reached to the knees. Caracalla extended this garment to the ankles and made it fashionable. Some sources even state that he distributed this tunic among the people. See Dio LXXVIII, 3; Aur. Vict. 21, 1; *HA, Carac.* 9, 7 and *Sev.* 21, 11; *Jord. Rom.* 277.

¹⁹ Dio LXXVI, 9, 4. Constantine would make similar efforts to find a glorious predecessor in 310 (see Appendix A).

²⁰ Unfortunately, Severus’ soldiers—given free rein by their master—then sacked and burned Lugdunum (Herod. III, 7, 7). Albinus suffered what is called *damnatio memoriae*, meaning that he was excluded and obliterated from official accounts (see below for more on this concept).

²¹ See Appendix C for more on how the army developed under the Principate and during the time of the tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty.

²² Dio LV, 24, 4. Their bases became the cities of Singara and Rhesaina in the newly created province of *Mesopotamia* (Birley 2002, 132).

Still in 197, then, Severus headed East again, intent on completing his great Eastern campaign against Parthia. This time, the mission proved even easier than two years earlier: Severus infiltrated the heart of Mesopotamia, where he sacked three major cities—Seleucia, Babylon, and Ctesiphon. Early in 198, he created a new province north of Osroene, in the upper reaches of Mesopotamia. Confusingly, he named it *Mesopotamia*, with the important city of Nisibis at its heart. Cassius Dio, a contemporary, bitterly remarked that nothing but perpetual warfare had been gained from the creation of the two provinces beyond the Euphrates, that these regions offered the empire little yet could only be held at vast cost, that the empire now extended to nations nearer to the Parthians than to Rome, and that “we are now, as it were, constantly fighting their wars”.²³ Severus spent five years in the East (mostly in Syria, but also in Egypt). He took up the consulship in Antioch with his elder son Caracalla on 1 January 202 and returned via Asia Minor and the Balkans to Rome. Here, he celebrated the 10th anniversary of his reign (his *decennalia*) on 9 April (mathematically a little prematurely).²⁴ The triumphal arch of Septimius Severus, erected as part of these celebrations (but not completed until 204), still stands in the Roman Forum (*Forum Romanum*) in commemoration of his two successful Parthian expeditions.

One of the indisputable priorities of Septimius Severus’ reign was care and concern for his soldiers. The emperor allowed them to marry while they were still on military service.²⁵ To be sure, this was little more than the formal legitimisation of a long-standing trend that had seen soldiers routinely cohabit with local women, but it did much to lift the social status of children born of such marriages.²⁶ Severus’ rule was also important for making the army more democratic and increasing soldiers’ social mobility, paving the way for ordinary troops to rise up through the ranks

²³ Dio LXXV, 3, 2–3.

²⁴ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 43. Birley (2002, 143) concluded that Severus celebrated his *dies imperii* (the date of his accession) at Carnuntum (as this is where, on that day, he had been proclaimed emperor by the soldiers).

²⁵ Herod. III, 8, 5.

²⁶ Campbell (1978) notes that, until Severus introduced his reforms, all children born of soldiers’ relationships with local women were illegitimate; in unions between a soldier and a non-citizen, children did not acquire Roman citizenship and could not inherit from their father.

and even become part of the equestrian order.²⁷ At this point, it is worth noting the double meaning of the word *equus* (plural *equites*): though it literally means “horseman” or “cavalryman”, it does not mean a soldier fighting on horseback here, but a member of the equestrian order (*ordo equester*). The *equites* (who required assets of at least 400,000 *sestertii* to be classed as such) were the second most important social group after the senatorial class (*ordo senatorius*) and may have numbered around 10,000 (or perhaps considerably more) throughout the empire during its early days.²⁸ Right from the beginning of the empire, *equites* were often appointed as governors (*procuratores*) of minor provinces, senior officials of central authorities, praetorian prefects, financial officers in the provinces, military officers in the legions, and commanders of auxiliary units (*auxilia*).²⁹ Egypt, too, was governed by a member of the equestrian order (with the title *praefectus*)—a major anomaly, considering that the other prominent provinces were governed by senators.³⁰ Although the senate still played a dominant role in the administration of the empire, its power was stagnating because Severus had allowed the *equites* to be far more involved in governance than ever before. Indeed, the three new legions created by Severus were commanded by members of the equestrian order. This went against the established practice of having a senator

²⁷ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 40.

²⁸ Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 39. In comparison, there were approximately 600 members of the senatorial class.

²⁹ Southern (2004, 19) reminds us that many able individuals from the equestrian order had been able to enjoy an illustrious career long before the reign of Septimius Severus, especially during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180). A good example of this is the emperor Pertinax, who was born the son of a freedman (!) and yet, courtesy of his abilities and the favour he had found with Marcus Aurelius, held many important offices, became a member of the senate, and twice served as consul.

³⁰ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 7–8. The significance of the governor of Egypt and the praetorian prefects needs no explanation, but it is also worth noting that there was a group of senior officials working directly at the imperial court who, despite belonging to the equestrian order, engaged in activities that were perhaps more important to the governance of the empire than those of any senator: there was an officer in charge of petitions and complaints from individuals (*a libellis*), another responsible for composing the emperor’s correspondence to cities, governors, and other officials in either Latin (*ab epistulis latinis*) or Greek (*ab epistulis graecis*), the administrator of imperial property (*a patrimonio*), and various imperial advisers of equestrian origin constituting—with selected senators—the emperor’s advisory council (*consilium principis*). See Potter (2004, 77–78), Ibbetson (2008, 196–197).

as legion commander. Furthermore, the two new provinces in the East (*Osroene* and *Mesopotamia*) were also governed by *equites*.³¹ The “horsemen” were now mainstays of Severus’ government and would go on to play an even more significant role in the future.

However, perhaps the most important of Septimius’ military reforms was the pay rise. Septimius Severus was the first emperor since Domitian to increase his soldiers’ salaries, and he did so very generously—some say by 50%, others by as much as 100%.³² This was evidently unavoidable and long overdue, as the prices of grain and other commodities had risen steadily over the decades.³³ However, following the large-scale confiscation of the property and wealth of his political enemies (those senators and *equites* who had sided with Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus), the emperor was obviously not in a position to raise the money he needed to cover the soldiers’ higher pay.³⁴ Loath to put up taxes, his only option was to devalue the currency.³⁵

During the reign of Septimius Severus, various cities in the East were still minting their own coins, mostly from bronze.³⁶ Naturally, coinage intended for use across the empire was struck at the central imperial mint

³¹ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 129. This arrangement in the new two provinces was modelled on Septimius’ Egypt, as the legions stationed here also had commanders from the equestrian order. The reason for this was that a legion commander from the senatorial class could not be subordinate to a provincial governor who was a mere *equus* (Goldsworthy 2009, 63).

³² Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 130. Beyer (1995, 18) mentions that Severus doubled the soldiers’ annual pay from 300 to 600 *denarii* (in 197 CE), with Caracalla then raising it to as much as 900 *denarii* (from 212 CE). Duncan-Jones (1994, 33), on the other hand, finds it ludicrous that Severus would have increased soldiers’ pay by more than one third. Southern (2004, 39) keeps his own counsel.

³³ Southern (2004, 265–266) observes that wheat prices rose very slowly from the first century BCE until the early third century, when they began to accelerate, and then grew at their fastest rate after 260. Harries (2012, 64) states that wheat prices rose 70-fold between the second century and Diocletian’s edict on maximum prices (issued in 301). Watson (1999, 126) and Williams (2000, 126) place the rise at a dizzying factor of 200. Birley (2002, 196), on the other hand, is reluctant to believe that soldiers’ pay was increased to compensate for inflation (“the evidence for inflation before 193 is defective”).

³⁴ Dio (LXXVI, 16, 1–4), in his account of Septimius Severus, writes that the emperor collected money every which way, short of having someone killed for it.

³⁵ Duncan-Jones (1994, 15) does also consider taxes.

³⁶ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 347. There were approximately 300 such cities in Asia Minor, Syria, and the Balkans. Egypt also had a special status. As we shall see later (Chapter 3), these local currencies persevered until the end of the third century.

in Rome (Severus also had a number of branches opened in the East for his Parthian wars). During the Severan dynasty and throughout the third century, these state coins fell into three categories, depending on the metal used. At the top, there was the *aureus*, introduced in the early days of the Principate. Minted in virtually pure gold (99%),³⁷ it had a stable weight roughly equivalent to a one-euro coin.³⁸ The gold-to-silver ratio was maintained throughout the time of the Principate (one *aureus* was originally valued at 25 silver *denarii*).³⁹ *Aurei* (and gold in general) maintained their value and were a way of passing on wealth, but otherwise they were impractical as either a means of exchange or getting paid. For instance, soldiers receiving 50 *denarii* per month under Septimius Severus could certainly have received two *aurei* instead, but they would have had to exchange them immediately, which would have been pointless.

Silver coins were subject to considerable fluctuation, or more accurately a decline, in the third century. At the beginning of the third century, the *denarius* was the standard silver currency in the Roman Empire. As prices rose during the Severan dynasty, the *denarius* gradually displaced the *sestertius* (see below) as the main medium of exchange and, most importantly, became the principal means of paying the wages of soldiers and officials. Severus had the silver content of the *denarius* debased in 194, just a year into his reign. This in itself was nothing new, since the proportion of this precious metal in the *denarius* had already begun to shrink under Nero, and by the end of Trajan's reign it had stabilised at 90%. The silver content decreased at its fastest rate under Marcus Aurelius (who needed lots of money to fund his wars against the barbarians along the Danube) and under his son Commodus (when it was reduced to about 75%). Even so, this debasement was still comparatively restrained and, most significantly, was not permanent. For example, Pertinax, after

³⁷ This purity was maintained for virtually the whole of the third century, punctuated only by brief reductions: first to 97% under Trebonianus Gallus (251–253), and then to 95–93% during the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus (253–268). Claudius Gothicus (268–270) restored the gold content to 99%. Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy*, 133.

³⁸ From the time of Augustus, the *aureus* weighed approximately 7.8 g; starting with Nero (54–68), it was reduced to 7.3 g. Between the reigns of Septimius Severus and Trebonianus Gallus, its weight decreased to 3.6 g, but under Aurelian (270–275) it increased again to 6.45 g. See Harl (1996, 132–134); Sutherland (1984, 134).

³⁹ In terms of pure metal, the ratio was 1:11.25 in 200 and 1:12 in 301 (Corbier 2008, 352). For coins it was similar: *denarii* (weighing just over 3 g) were more than twice as light as *aurei*.

his accession, acted quickly to restore the original silver content of the *denarius* (to 87%) and thus the population's confidence in the currency.⁴⁰ Severus, on the other hand, proved himself a true revolutionary when he reduced the silver content of the *denarius* to 55%.⁴¹ Not only that, he made the *denarius* a little lighter (reducing it from approximately 3.5 g to 3 g) and smaller.⁴² The more diminutive *denarii* sent a clear signal to the public that the government was devaluing the currency and engaging in the modern equivalent of "printing money". That is not to say that, at this point, the population had lost confidence in the silver coins minted under Septimius Severus. By taking this action, the government was able to put a large amount of coins into circulation and meet the needs of the state.⁴³ And regardless of the reduced silver content, the rate of the *denarius* to the *aureus* remained unchanged at the level established by the emperor Augustus: 1 *aureus* was still worth 25 *denarii* (though we should not overlook the fact that the *aureus* was also becoming lighter at this time).

The third coin category was the *aes*, struck variously from copper, a brass-like alloy of copper and zinc (also called *orichalcum* or *aurichalcum*), or a mix of copper and tin (bronze, also called *aes*).⁴⁴ The *sestertius* and its fractions—the half-*sestertius* (*dupondius*) and the quarter-*sestertius* (*as*)—were already minted from this material.⁴⁵ One *denarius* was worth four *sestertii* and, as already noted, it quickly became

⁴⁰ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 91.

⁴¹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 137. Cf. Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 113–114; Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy*, 127; Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire*, 101; Mattingly and Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume IV, Part I*, VI.

⁴² This cannot be determined with any precision. For example, ten randomly selected *denarii* struck at a single mint during a single year (196 CE) were found not only to vary in their silver content (between 47 and 61.8%), but also quite significantly in weight (from 2.74 g to 3.79 g) and size (varying in diameter from 1.57 cm to 1.86 cm). Naturally, coins may differ in size and weight because of wear and certain other factors. See Carter, G. F. and Carter, W. H. (1974).

⁴³ Harl (1996, 126) estimated that the number of *denarii* in circulation increased by between one third and one half under Septimius Severus and Caracalla.

⁴⁴ Corbier, "Coinage and Taxation", 332–333.

⁴⁵ There were also fractions of the *as*—the half-*as* (*semi*) and quarter-*as* (*quadrans*), but these ceased to be minted from the middle of the second century.

the main medium of exchange at a time when the coinage was being consistently debased.

This devaluation of the currency by the government, if deliberate, was a satisfactory short-term solution because it raised a lot of money that could be used not only to increase soldiers' pay, but also for other public spending. According to the emperor's adviser, Cassius Dio, Severus went on a frantic construction spree (especially in his home city of Leptis Magna) and also had a large number of old buildings repaired (prompting Dio's rather petulant observation that the emperor had his name engraved even on these repaired buildings as if he had built them himself with his own money). Despite this extravagance, the state coffers were still in a healthy state after the emperor's death.⁴⁶ Taking a longer-term view, however, this was an ill-advised and quite reckless policy. In peacetime, the government might still have managed to keep inflation under control, and the amounts of money being thrown into circulation might have acted as an economic stimulus, especially for the frontier areas. Instead, the political instability that followed the end of the Severan dynasty combined with the great barbarian invasions to cause, as we shall see, the virtual collapse of the currency in the second half of the third century.⁴⁷

In 208, Severus headed for Britain, "knowing he would not return".⁴⁸ At this time, Hadrian's Wall once again formed the Roman Empire's frontier in Britain.⁴⁹ The aim of Severus' expedition was ambitious: to conquer the remainder of the island. The emperor set up his headquarters in Eboracum (present-day York), as would the emperor Constantius I, Constantine's father, less than a century later. Severus had the Antonine Wall reoccupied by garrisons and waged war on the Caledonians and Maeatae in what is now Scotland in 208/9 (although by now his ill-health obliged him to be carried around in a litter). He managed to reach the northern edge of the island, but was unable to subdue it. There was a second expedition in 210, this time led by Caracalla. Geta, always in his

⁴⁶ Dio LXXVI, 16, 3–4. This ran into "very many myriads [i.e. tens of thousands] of drachmas" (by "drachmas", Dio appears to mean *denarii* here).

⁴⁷ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 200.

⁴⁸ Dio LXXVI, 11, 1.

⁴⁹ The Antonine Wall, built under the emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161) about 160 km north of Hadrian's Wall, was evidently ready for use in 143. However, the frontier reverted to Hadrian's Wall from the beginning of Marcus Aurelius' reign (161–180). See Fulford (2007, 565–566).

elder brother's shadow,⁵⁰ remained with their sick father in York, and it was here that Severus died on 4 February 211.⁵¹ Severus' last words to his sons are said to have been, "Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, scorn all others".⁵²

Caracalla may actually have completed his expedition against the northern barbarians in 211, before making peace with them and returning to Rome—just as Commodus had done in 180. As a result, the frontier once again receded to Hadrian's Wall.⁵³ Caracalla had no intention of heeding the first part of his father's advice, because when he and Geta returned to Rome he had his brother slain (probably on 26 December 211).⁵⁴ The brothers cordially detested each other and it was obvious that they could not and would not rule together. This is when Caracalla first showed himself to be a cruel tyrant: he pretended that Geta had been plotting against him, but that he had miraculously escaped ambush, and used this as a pretext to have many of Geta's followers, friends, and favourites executed, including a number of senators and *equites*.⁵⁵ Even the praetorian prefect and celebrated jurist Papinian was beheaded. Cornificia, daughter of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, was not spared either.

Moreover, after his death, Geta suffered *damnatio memoriae*. All portraits and statues of him were destroyed and any mention of him on inscriptions was obliterated; the resulting blank spaces in the inscriptions that might still be a mute reminder of him were then filled in with other text, typically additional titles for Caracalla. Even the simple letter "g" in those inscriptions that contained the abbreviation *augg* (standing for

⁵⁰ Caracalla was given the imperial rank of *caesar* in 195 (or 196), Geta in 197 (or 198); Caracalla was appointed *augustus* in 198, whereas Geta was apparently made to wait until 209 (Kienast 1996, 162 and 166).

⁵¹ He was 65 years old. The emperor Constantius must have been of a similar age when he died in 306, also in York. Indeed, like Constantius, Severus had brought his elder son with him to initiate him into the administration of the empire and the conduct of war.

⁵² Dio LXXVI, 15, 2.

⁵³ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 188.

⁵⁴ This is the date proffered by Birley (2002, 189), Campbell (2008a, 16), and Goldsworthy (2009, 70). Kienast (1996, 166) suggests 19 or 26 December; Potter (2004, 135) concludes that it was 25 December.

⁵⁵ If Cassius Dio is to be believed, Caracalla's rampaging resulted in an incredible 20,000 victims. Cf. Herod. IV, 6, 1–4.

the plural *augusti*, i.e. for both Caracalla and Geta, as opposed to *aug*, denoting emperor in the singular) was erased. It was as though Geta had never existed.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Caracalla clearly acted on the second part of his father's advice; like Severus, he increased the soldiers' pay, although we do not know by how much.⁵⁷ To fund this, he further devalued the *denarius* (reducing it to 51% purity) and, in 215, he introduced a new coin named after himself: the *antoninianus*. The idea was for the new coin to be worth twice as much as the *denarius* while weighing just 1.5 times more (the *antoninianus* weighed 5 g, as opposed to the 3.2 g of the Caracalla *denarius*). This generated a lot of money for Caracalla, but in going down this path he was gambling with the public's confidence in the currency. It also set a precedent, showing other emperors how to make huge sums of money for little effort. Each subsequent emperor all the way through to Claudius Gothicus (bar Philip the Arab) reduced the silver content of the *antoninianus*.⁵⁸ until it reached the point, in the 260s, where mints were churning out hundreds of millions of silver-washed *antoniniani* a year, which they struck by recycling money made just a few years earlier. Old coins disappeared quickly from circulation, partly because people hoarded them.⁵⁹ The public's confidence in the new coins was well and

⁵⁶ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 189. What is particularly noteworthy is Cassius Dio's account (LXXVII, 12, 6) that coins depicting Geta were also withdrawn from circulation and melted down. While the mechanism for withdrawing coins from circulation remains unknown to us, it was undoubtedly frequently used by the government when a substantial debasement of silver coins was required.

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Cassius Dio is of no help here. Herodian (IV, 4, 7) mentions a 50% hike immediately after Geta's death, but only in reference to the praetorians. Whether the legions received the same rise is questionable. Duncan-Jones (1994, 15) believes they did, but does not go into specifics. Corbier (2008, 382) claims that, under Caracalla, annual pay was raised to 600 *denarii*, while Beyer (1995, 18) suggests 900 *denarii*.

⁵⁸ The silver content of *antoniniani* shrank from an original 52% under Caracalla to around 42% under Gordian III, then rose to 47% under Philip, only to drop to 41% under Decius and then 36% under Trebonianus Gallus, before ultimately dwindling to 19% under Valerian and a mere 6% under Gallienus. Nor did it stop there: it eventually bottomed out at a minuscule 1.71% in 269, during the reign of Claudius Gothicus. Aurelian, having restored the integrity of the empire and, in doing so, gaining full access to silver resources, could afford to increase the silver content of his *antoniniani* to 5% in 274. See Harl (1996, 130).

⁵⁹ Gresham's law states that "bad money drives out good", i.e. if a system uses two types of the same coin with the same face value but with a different proportion of precious metal, users will withdraw the higher quality ones from circulation. Those Romans who

truly shattered once their weight and appearance lost all similarity to the old coins that had been in circulation less than a generation earlier.⁶⁰ When, under the rule of Valerian and Gallienus, the new *antoniniani* had been reduced to nothing but silver-coated bronze, people even pointedly removed the coating, which was being worn away with use anyway, so that they could melt it and extract the precious metal.⁶¹ As for the *denarii*, their weight remained at 3 g and their silver content hovered around 50% after Septimius Severus' reign. However, the government progressively minted fewer and fewer *denarii* and ever-increasing numbers of *antoniniani*. Although no new *denarii* were struck after the mid-third century,⁶² they continued to be used in the calculation of payments and prices until the end of the century. The *denarius* thus became a “ghost currency”.⁶³ As mentioned above, the debasement of silver coins undermined public confidence in the currency and triggered inflation. The government was caught in a vicious circle: as prices rose, it increased the soldiers' pay; needing more money to pay the soldiers, it debased its silver coins; the debasement of the coins depressed their market value in real terms; as the value of the coins fell, prices rose. This went hand in hand with the collapse of the base currency. Since silver coins were constantly being debased and devalued, the need for coins made of bronze, copper and brass also declined, so they were minted less and less until finally, under Gallienus, they stopped being made altogether.⁶⁴

Caracalla's most famous act—his granting of Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire (in his edict known as the *constitutio Antoniniana*), probably in 212—may have been motivated by the

could afford to, hoarded the older coins (with higher silver and gold content) and paid their taxes with the new, devalued money.

⁶⁰ The *antoninianus* weighed 4.6 g in 238, but only 2.8 g in 270 (Estiot 2012, 542).

⁶¹ Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy*, 131–132.

⁶² According to Harl (1996, 129) and Estiot (2012, 543), the last emperor to mint *denarii* was Gordian III (238–244). Corbier (2008, 334), however, suggests that “the minting of the denarius finally stops around 250”. The *denarii* withdrawn from circulation at this time were simply re-minted as *antoniniani* (which probably also adopted the same 1:25 rate relative to the *aureus*).

⁶³ Bagnall and Bransbourg, “The Constantian Monetary Revolution”.

⁶⁴ Minting of the *sestertius* ceased around 260 (Corbier 2008, 334). Later, in the context of Aurelian's reform (see below), there was an attempt to reintroduce these base coins into circulation.

prospect of raising more money. On the face of it, this measure applied to everyone (the jurist Ulpian, who by all accounts helped to formulate the enactment, makes this clear),⁶⁵ but actually excepted the *peregrini dediticii*, i.e. persons who had surrendered to the Roman state, placed themselves at its mercy, and had no public rights apart from personal liberty (these would mainly have been prisoners of war from Barbaricum), and *libertini* (freed slaves).⁶⁶ Effectively, then, it covered all inhabitants who had been born free. Now that the former dividing line between citizens and non-citizens had disappeared with the stroke of a pen, anyone living in the empire could pursue a civilian or military career. Admittedly, what with Roman citizenship already having been handed out bit by bit for many years, it had long ceased to be viewed as a privilege. Besides, a new social divide had crept in: the bisection of citizens into the rather legally nebulous *honestiores* and *humiliores*.⁶⁷

Most modern writers are convinced,⁶⁸ or at least are inclined to believe,⁶⁹ that financial considerations were Caracalla's main motivation for this edict, since certain taxes (e.g. inheritance and manumission tax) were payable only by citizens. This is reflected in the fact that—according to Cassius Dio—Caracalla increased these very taxes (which the soaring numbers of citizens were required to pay) from 5 to 10%.⁷⁰ On top of that, he imposed entirely new taxes and made life difficult for the empire's citizens by demanding irregular contributions and introducing various other obligations, such as the requirement for local budgets to cover the cost of supplying troops on the move or of building *mansiones* (rest stops) on Roman roads. Whatever it was that drove Caracalla to all these acts, they had the cumulative effect of generating additional funds for the treasury. Duncan-Jones estimated that the empire's annual budget in around 215 would have been approximately 1,500 million *sestertii* (i.e.

⁶⁵ *Digesta* I, 5, 17 (*In orbe Romano qui sunt ex constitutione imperatoris Antonini cives Romani effecti sunt*).

⁶⁶ Bartošek, *Dějiny římského práva ve třech fázích jeho vývoje*, 87.

⁶⁷ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 17; Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 195.

⁶⁸ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 16; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 138.

⁶⁹ Bartošek, *Dějiny římského práva ve třech fázích jeho vývoje*, 130.

⁷⁰ See Dio LXXVII, 9. Campbell (2008a, 17–18) concedes that this increase was made, but is not convinced of the emperor's motivation (“the greatest enigma of the reign”; “The motive remains obscure”).

375 million *denarii*) and ran a comparison with the period around 150, for which he arrived at a figure of some 900 million *sestertii* (225 million *denarii*).⁷¹

In early 213, Caracalla left Rome for Raetia, which had come under threat from the Alamanni. This is the first time our sources mention this confederation of Germanic tribes.⁷² Caracalla entered the *Agri Decumates*,⁷³ made short work of the Alamanni by the river Main, and at the end of 213 was rewarded for his efforts with the title *Germanicus maximus*.⁷⁴ In 214, he set off for the Danube, where, according to Herodian, he negotiated rather than fought with the Germanic tribes.⁷⁵ He then made his way East and wintered in Nicomedia (214/5). Caracalla appears to have heeded the third part of his father's advice ("scorn all others"), too, as Cassius Dio—a member of the court at that time—relates how the emperor would send for him and other important dignitaries at daybreak, ostensibly to engage in official or judicial business and other duties, but would keep them waiting outside (not even allowing them into the vestibule) till noon, and often until evening, before ultimately sending them word that he had no need of them that day.⁷⁶ When in the East, Caracalla mostly sojourned in Antioch and Edessa, but at the turn of 216 he also paid a visit to Alexandria in Egypt, where, on his orders, his army carried out the wholesale massacre of locals simply because he had heard that the people of that city had been mocking him.⁷⁷

In 216, Caracalla embarked on a campaign against the Parthians. He exploited the fact that Parthia was politically divided, with Vologases V controlling Ctesiphon and the surrounding area, while his brother Artabanus V ruled the rest of the empire.⁷⁸ Caracalla is said to have asked

⁷¹ Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire*, 45.

⁷² Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 43. Sources: Aur. Vict. 21, 2; Dio LXXVII, 13, 4–5.

⁷³ This is the area between the Upper Rhine and the Upper Danube, which came under imperial rule during the Flavian dynasty and belonged to the provinces of Raetia and *Germania Superior*.

⁷⁴ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 163.

⁷⁵ Herod. IV, 7, 1–4. His mention of the fact that Germanic peoples were recruited into auxiliary regiments is particularly interesting.

⁷⁶ Dio LXXVII, 17, 3.

⁷⁷ Herod. IV, 9, 2–8; Dio LXXVII, 22–23.

⁷⁸ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 19; Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, 244.

Artabanus for his daughter's hand in marriage, and the refusal served as a pretext for his invasion.⁷⁹ Less plausible is Herodian's account that a deal was actually struck, after which Caracalla and his army peacefully entered Parthia and approached the royal palace, whereupon he ordered his soldiers to slaughter all the Parthians who had gathered in expectation of a wedding. Artabanus, he relates, barely escaped the carnage.⁸⁰ In any case, Caracalla plundered the territory of northern Mesopotamia and was in the process of preparing another campaign for the following year when he was assassinated on his way from Edessa to Carrhae on 8 April 217.⁸¹ The mastermind behind the murder, the praetorian prefect Macrinus, had the deed done by a soldier who, right after the assassination, was himself very conveniently killed by the emperor's Germanic bodyguard. Considering how popular Caracalla had been among the army, Macrinus had to be careful not to arouse suspicion. How he came up with the idea of assassinating the emperor is an extraordinary story in itself. Herodian explains that, some time before, Caracalla had sent a trusted friend in Rome a request for a divination of his future, asking him to focus in particular on any possible dangers to his life and reign. A letter in response, singling out Macrinus, soon made its way to the East. Macrinus, whose duties included sorting through the emperor's correspondence, read the letter and realised with dread that he had to dispose of the emperor before he began wondering where the reply from Rome had got to.⁸² In the confusion that followed the assassination, Macrinus kept a low profile. While Adventus, the second praetorian prefect, was the first choice among the military as imperial successor, Macrinus subtly enlisted the support of the army and, in his correspondence, won over the governors of the surrounding provinces. On the third day following Caracalla's death (11 April), after Adventus—allegedly citing his old age—had refused the offer of the emperorship, Macrinus made a public appearance before the troops to accept the imperial title.⁸³

⁷⁹ Dio LXXVIII, 1.

⁸⁰ Herod. IV, 10–11. Compelling arguments have been raised against the historicity of this episode by the likes of Patterson (2013, 24).

⁸¹ Dio LXXVIII, 5; Herod. IV, 13.

⁸² Herod. IV, 12, 3–8. The same story, with some variation, is told by Cassius Dio (LXXVIII, 4).

⁸³ Herod. IV, 14, 2. Adventus' refusal of the imperial title (his *recusatio imperii* or *refutatio imperii*) was extraordinary only in that it was successful. It was much more common

As a praetorian prefect, Marcus Opellius Macrinus was a mere *eques*, and as such was the first emperor not to hail from the senatorial class. In his dealings with the senate, this proved to be a bigger stumbling block than the fact that he was of low birth and a Moor (he was from the town of Caesarea in Mauretania, Africa, i.e. present-day Cherchell, Algeria). Macrinus invited even more trouble by appointing people of very low birth to very high stations. A contemporary of these events, the senator Cassius Dio, cites several examples with disdain, and chides Macrinus in particular for making Adventus, his fellow praetorian prefect, not only consul but also urban prefect (*praefectus urbi*), even though he was not a senator and “as consul was not even capable of meaningful conversation with his senatorial colleagues; he therefore pleaded illness on the day he took up his consulship”.⁸⁴ Macrinus’ greatest concern for the time being, however, was what plans the Parthians were hatching. King Artabanus had exploited the political uncertainty among the Romans to invade Roman Mesopotamia, even demanding that the Romans vacate the province. The elderly Macrinus may have been a seasoned official and experienced lawyer, but he was no general. Sometime during the spring of 217, the Romans suffered a defeat at Nisibis. This was followed by protracted negotiations between the two sides that concluded with a truce at the end of the year.⁸⁵ Macrinus badly needed this peace, even if it meant achieving no success at all in the East. He did not have to cede any territory, but this came at a cost: he was forced to pay the Parthians 50 million *denarii* (i.e. 200 million *sestertii*).⁸⁶ Money was starting to

for a candidate to start by feigning refusal of the emperorship, only to accept it after some “persuasion”. This is what Pertinax did, and it was also the approach Constantine would take on the day of his election. Cassius Dio (LXXVIII, 11) relates that—for appearance’s sake—Macrinus, too, was reluctant to accept the imperial title on the day of his election.

⁸⁴ Dio LXXVIII, 13–15. On the other hand, there were matters on which the new emperor and the senate were able to reach agreement quickly. Caracalla had enjoyed such popularity among his soldiers that the senate and the new emperor prevaricated over whether to repudiate or celebrate his memory, and in the end did neither. Macrinus himself, intending to build on the legacy of Septimius Severus, added the name Severus to his own (*Imperator Caesar Marcus Opellius Severus Macrinus Augustus*). Although Caracalla was eventually deified, it is not clear whether his apotheosis was ordered while Macrinus was still on the throne or later, under Elagabalus (Kienast 1996, 163).

⁸⁵ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 169. According to Campbell (2008a, 20), the battle was fought in the autumn of 217 and a peace settlement was not reached until 218.

⁸⁶ Dio LXXVIII, 27; cf. Herod. IV, 12 (who does not specify an amount).

dry up. Macrinus decided to solve this problem by slashing the army budget—he would keep existing soldiers’ salaries as they were, but reduce new conscripts’ pay to the level set by Septimius Severus (in practice this meant a 50% cut).⁸⁷ This course of action alienated both the senate and the army.

Once Geta and Caracalla had been assassinated, it may have seemed that the curtain had been brought down on the Severan dynasty, but this was not entirely true. Julia Domna, Septimius Severus’ wife, had a sister named Julia Maesa, who had two daughters. Each of those daughters had a son—Julia Soaemias had a boy named Varius Avitus Bassianus, who was 14 or 15 years old in 218, and Julia Mamaea had 9-year-old Alexianus. Young he may have been, but Bassianus was a priest of the deity Elagabalus in the city of Emesa (present-day Homs, Syria). In fact, he would later adopt—and generally be known in the history books by—the name of that god. Emesa was famous for this cult, which Herodian mistook for that of a sun god.⁸⁸ In Aramaic, however, it literally means the god (*El*) of the mountain (*gabal*), and Herodian himself testifies that this deity was venerated in the form of a black stone (which was likely a meteorite).⁸⁹ To the local Greeks, however, the name sounded like Heliogabalus (*helios* = sun) and over time the mountain god and the sun god were assimilated into one.⁹⁰

Julia Maesa decided that the elder of her grandsons would be emperor. She and her money persuaded the soldiers at Emesa (where *Legio III Gallica* was stationed) that her nephew Caracalla had fathered a son with her daughter and that, as Bassianus was therefore Caracalla’s issue, he was the true heir to the throne.⁹¹ On 16 May 218, Bassianus, who had taken the name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, was proclaimed emperor by the soldiers at Emesa. Macrinus’ commander marched on Emesa with *Legio II Parthica*, but this attack proved ineffectual and Macrinus retreated to

⁸⁷ Cassius Dio (LXXVIII, 36) says that Caracalla’s fifty per cent increase in soldiers’ pay cost the state 280 million *sestertii* a year. Macrinus needed a large amount of money right away to pay the king, but he also evidently realised that the Roman state would need a financial reserve in the future. See Duncan-Jones (1994, 18).

⁸⁸ Herod. V, 3, 4 (the name is given as *Elaiagabalos*); see also *HA*, *Heliog.* 1, 5; *Macr.* 9, 2. Also erroneously in Campbell (2008a, 21) (“the sun god at Emesa”).

⁸⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 148.

⁹⁰ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 71 and 193.

⁹¹ Herod. V, 3, 10–12; *HA*, *Macr.* 9; *Heliog.* 2, 1.

Antioch, where a battle was fought on 8 June. Macrinus fled the field and his army surrendered. Macrinus perished as he made his escape, as did his nine-year-old son Diadumenianus, whom he had made his co-ruler in May of that year.⁹² Macrinus is one of the third century's minor but more interesting emperors. Aside from his number-one priority of simply saving his own skin, he also sought to keep the state finances afloat, maintain the prestige of the empire in the East, and cultivate good relations with the senate and the army; it is not entirely his fault that all these efforts came to naught.

The new emperor entered Antioch the day after his victory. He stopped his soldiers from sacking the city by giving each of them 2,000 *sestertii* (mostly collected from the people of Antioch). He then sent a letter to the senate in Rome, promising to govern in the same manner as the emperor Augustus, whose youth he had invoked upon entering politics; he also slandered and denounced his predecessor.⁹³ Those promises were empty: his entire reign was dictated by his mother and grandmother, who had secured the throne for him in the first place, and he made the same mistakes as his predecessor. Publius Valerius Comazon, the commander of *Legio III Gallica*, who had been instrumental in bringing Bassianus to power, was appointed praetorian prefect, consul, and (thrice in succession) urban prefect, despite his low birth and lack of administrative experience; similarly, centurions and people, again, of very humble birth were promoted to provincial governors and to the senate.⁹⁴ Unlike Macrinus, Bassianus, after spending some time in Antioch and then Nicomedia, actually reached Rome (probably in August or September 218).⁹⁵ His journey from the East, however, was lined, so to speak, with the corpses

⁹² Macrinus was either apprehended and executed in Chalcedon, a town in Bithynia (Herod. V, 4, 11), or was captured in Chalcedon and then killed as he was being escorted to Antioch (Dio LXXIX, 39–40). Cf. *HA, Macr.* 15, 1; *Zos.* I, 10. The memory of Macrinus and his son was obliterated, i.e. they both suffered *damnatio memoriae* (Kienast 1996, 169).

⁹³ Dio LXXIX, 1.

⁹⁴ This topic is handled very eloquently in *HA, Heliog.* 11–12. See Dio LXXIX, 4, on Comazon.

⁹⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 154; Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 172.

of high-ranking figures who had been mainstays of Macrinus' government or who had not declared their allegiance to Bassianus quite quickly enough.⁹⁶

Bassianus was not only a priest, but also a fanatical follower of his god. Since the people of Emesa worshipped this deity in the form of a massive black meteorite, he could now literally bring his god with him to Rome and build a temple to him on the Palatine.⁹⁷ The reverse of an *aureus* from his reign depicts a quadriga carrying the black stone from Emesa to Rome.⁹⁸ But while waiting for his god's dignified home to be completed, Bassianus put him up at the finest hotel in Rome a deity could hope for—the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.⁹⁹ Jupiter is unlikely to have been that thrilled with his new housemate, especially when, in 220, the emperor ousted Jupiter as the head of the Roman pantheon and officially elevated his own idol to the position of supreme imperial god. He then styled himself “the most exalted priest of the invincible sun god Elagabalus” (*sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti solis Elagabali*).¹⁰⁰ To the credit of the mint workers, such designations are relegated to the reverse of his coins, while the emperor's likeness and the titles on the obverse remain entirely conventional (mostly *Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus*). Nevertheless, from this year onwards the emperor took the name of his god for himself. In the same year, he also devised a peculiar way of creating unity between his god and all the other gods over whom Elagabalus was superior: he had the Palladium—an ancient statue of the goddess Pallas (Athena), which had supposedly long ago come to Rome from Troy and was kept in the shrine of Vesta—transported to Elagabalus' temple to become the god's wife.¹⁰¹ Eventually, however, he “divorced” her from his god on the grounds that she was too warlike and married him instead to a goddess whom (again in the form of a meteorite) he had ordered be brought to Rome from Carthage

⁹⁶ A long list and various stories can be found in Dio LXXIX, 3–7.

⁹⁷ Herod. V, 6, 6–10; *HA, Heliog.* 3, 4. On attempts to identify the site of this temple, see Icks (2011, 27–28).

⁹⁸ Mattingly, Sydenham, and Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume IV, Part II*, 32.

⁹⁹ Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 80; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 172; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 154.

¹⁰¹ *HA, Heliog.* 6, 7–9.

for that purpose, and whom Herodianos and Cassius Dio call Urania, the goddess of the heavens.¹⁰² Incidentally, he is said to have moved all sorts of other relics of the official Roman cult to the new temple and, seeing as all gods were servants of his own deity, to have declared that even Jews and Christians were to hold their services in this temple.¹⁰³

The emperor had clearly crossed a line. To be sure, local cults could be imported into Rome, but only after they had been domesticated, at least to some extent, within Graeco-Roman religion.¹⁰⁴ Only assimilated cults could receive state support. Thus, for example, the Egyptian deities Serapis and Isis may have had their adherents in Rome, even among the upper classes of society, but they had no state support, whereas the Phrygian goddess Cybele, notorious for her ecstatic and orgiastic cult, had been transported from Pessinus in Asia Minor (where she had been venerated in the form of a black meteorite) to Rome back in 204 BCE, at the time Hannibal was posing a threat to the Roman state, and, once here, continued to be worshipped as the Great Mother of the Gods (*Magna Mater*). For clarity, this was an exception precipitated by dangers to the state, the Sibylline Books' oracles, and the observation of bad omens.¹⁰⁵ And although this cult was tolerated, it could only be practised in the complex of the temple that had been built to this goddess on the Palatine (normally, temples to oriental deities were built outside the *pomerium*, i.e. outside the actual territory of the city of Rome).¹⁰⁶ The similarities between these two episodes are obvious: in both cases, a black meteorite was imported from the East with great veneration and was subsequently installed and worshipped in a large temple in Rome. But there are also stark differences between them: while *Magna Mater* had taken her place alongside the other gods, in this new henotheistic revolution Elagabalus was to be the new lord of all gods. Moreover, the

¹⁰² Herod. V, 6, 4. He claims that the Phoenicians called her the Mistress of the Stars (*Astroarche*) and identified her with the Moon. See also Dio LXXIX, 12.

¹⁰³ *HA, Heliog.* 3, 4–5; 7, 1; 7, 4. It was said, among other things, to be the meteorite of the Great Mother of the Gods (see below).

¹⁰⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 153–154.

¹⁰⁵ See Livy XXIX, 10–14. Finding a meteorite large enough to be worthy of worship is not actually that difficult. For example, four meteorites weighing 40–152 kg fell in Turkey in the second half of the twentieth century. See <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/meteor/metbull.php>.

¹⁰⁶ Vidman, *Od Olympu k Panteonu*, 48–49.

dances and obscene rituals associated with the worship of the new god offended the Romans' religious sensibilities, not to mention the fact that the emperor had married a Vestal Virgin (a crime normally punishable by burying the Vestal alive and flogging to death whomever had taken her virginity).¹⁰⁷

It should be noted that what was so revolutionary about the fact that Elagabalus was identified with the sun was the method of worship, not the actual veneration of a sun deity. At the time Elagabalus' divinity was "brought" to Rome, the worship of a sun god was not exactly a novel phenomenon in Rome or elsewhere in the empire, as reflected, for example, in coins from the time of the Principate¹⁰⁸ and in the colossal statue erected by Nero at the Colosseum, which Vespasian subsequently had modified into the image of the sun god Sol.¹⁰⁹ The state sun cult spread throughout the early empire and had followers particularly in the military and often in high places. For example, sometime in 183–185, during the reign of the emperor Commodus, Gaius Caerellius Sabinus—the legate of the thirteenth legion stationed in Apulum, a city in the province of Dacia, had an inscription carved announcing that he had rebuilt a temple to Sol Invictus there.¹¹⁰ This implies that such a temple—and hence a cult and a large body of worshippers—had existed here for some time. In the same place, and just a little later (in 193–197), another commander of the same legion left a votive inscription to the sun deity,¹¹¹ as did a further commander of that legion sometime between 198 and 209.¹¹² In fact, the Syrian god Elagabalus himself had had adherents

¹⁰⁷ Icks (2011, 32) views this act as an attempt to reduce the gulf between Roman religion and the new religion from Emesa.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Trajan (Mattingly & Sydenham, 1926, 267), and Hadrian, whose *auri* depict Sol, in one case as an *auriga* (a charioteer of a quadriga) with reins in one hand and a whip in the other (*ibid.*, 360). Sol actually appears on coins much earlier, e.g. on the coins of Mark Antony during the later days of the republic.

¹⁰⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* XXXIV, 45 (*dicatus Soli venerationi est*); cf. Suet. *Vesp.* 18; Dio LXV, 15, 1.

¹¹⁰ CIL III, 1111 (*Soli Invicto aedem restituit Gaius Caerellius Sabinus legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae*). See Halsberghe (1972, 47–48).

¹¹¹ CIL III, 1013 (*Soli Invicto Quintus Caecilius Laetus legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae votum libens solviti*).

¹¹² CIL III, 1118 (*Soli Quintus Marcius Victor Felix Maximillianus legatus Augustorum legionis XIII Geminae et Pullaiena Caeliana clarissima femina eius et Publius*

in the West of the empire for half a century before the emperor Elagabalus even took to the throne. He is mentioned on an inscription in the province of *Germania Inferior* from the time of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161).¹¹³ Presumably, the sheer reach of his cult into the West was spontaneous, perhaps spread by the redeployment of auxiliary troops that had been in Syria.

Elagabalus' deity, as we have mentioned, was called Sol Invictus Elagabalus, but another god with a very similar name—Sol Invictus Mithras—was around at the same time and had long been known within the empire. Although there are similarities between the two cults, the one promoted by Elagabalus needs to be distinguished from Mithraism.¹¹⁴ We do not know where or when Mithraism originated, but it seems to have been a domestic cult rather than an imported one.¹¹⁵ It evidently arose within the empire (probably) in the late first century CE, spread during the second, flourished in the third, and disappeared at the turn of the fifth.¹¹⁶ It was a highly distinctive cult whose followers organised themselves into small communities that congregated in modest underground sanctuaries (*mithraea*). There were a great many of these subterranean temples across the empire, with larger concentrations in Rome and the border provinces. The cult's adherents, often recruited from the military, went through seven grades of initiation.¹¹⁷ It should be stressed that Mithraism was

Marcus Victor Maximilianus clarissimus puer filius voto); Halsberghe (ibid., 112–115) lists a number of other epigraphs.

¹¹³ *AE* 1994, 1285: *P(ro) s(alute) i(mperatoris) C(aesaris) T(iti) A(eli) Ha(driani)/A(ntonini) A(ugusti) P(ii)/Soli Helaga/balo et Miner(vae) / L(ucius) Terentius/ Bassus (centurio) coh(ortis)/ III Breucor(um)*. See <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD051690>.

¹¹⁴ Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, 120.

¹¹⁵ Beck (1998) favours the view that Mithraism originated in Commagene, a Roman client state on the border with the Parthian Empire and Syria in eastern Asia Minor, whence it spread to the empire in the late first century CE; Halsberghe (1972, 117) concurs. Clauss (2001, 7), on the other hand, argues that Mithraism originated in Rome or Ostia and spread throughout the empire from there. Berrens (2004, 25) and Walsh (2019, 4) are more hesitant when it comes to pinpointing the origins of Mithraism.

¹¹⁶ According to Walsh (2019, 1), “Only two or three mithraea look to have still been in use in the early decades of the 5th c., and these were soon abandoned as well”.

¹¹⁷ For details on this cult, see, in particular, Beck (2006) and Clauss (2001).

a private religion that was never supported by the state.¹¹⁸ Even when, in 308, the tetrarchs jointly invoked Mithra (in a surviving inscription in the *mithraeum* in Carnuntum, where their meeting took place—see Chapter 6), this was not the work of a state cult, but the private initiative of those involved.¹¹⁹ The same applies to the emperor Julian the Apostate, who was even privy to the Mithraic mysteries.¹²⁰

“Elagabalus was not a tyrant, but he was an incompetent, probably the least able emperor Rome had ever had”.¹²¹ The only reason he was able to rule at all was because his mother, Julia Soaemias, and his grandmother, Julia Maesa, held the reins for him. In fact, it was following a decision by his grandmother that, on 26 July 221, Elagabalus formally adopted her other daughter Julia Mamaea’s 12-year-old son, i.e. the emperor’s cousin Bassianus Alexianus, who was given the name Marcus Aurelius Alexander and the title of *caesar*. This made him Elagabalus’ successor (which was “perhaps the only really sane act of the reign”).¹²² When the envious Elagabalus tried to kill his cousin, he himself was assassinated by the praetorians on 12 March 222.¹²³ He was just 18 years old. His mother, Julia Soaemias, perished with him, and their corpses were dragged through the city before eventually being cast into the Tiber.¹²⁴ On top of that, Elagabalus suffered *damnatio memoriae*. So, essentially did his god, in that it was returned to Emesa. Elagabalus’ reign served as a warning and lesson

¹¹⁸ Halsberghe (1972, 56) makes a distinction between Mithraism and the cult of Elagabalus, but notes that Mithraism may nevertheless have been a kind of breeding ground for the state promotion of the deity Sol Invictus Elagabalus, and that “few could distinguish between the two”.

¹¹⁹ Berrens, “Sonnenkult und Kaisertum von den Severern bis zum Constantin I.,” 27; Claus, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, 28.

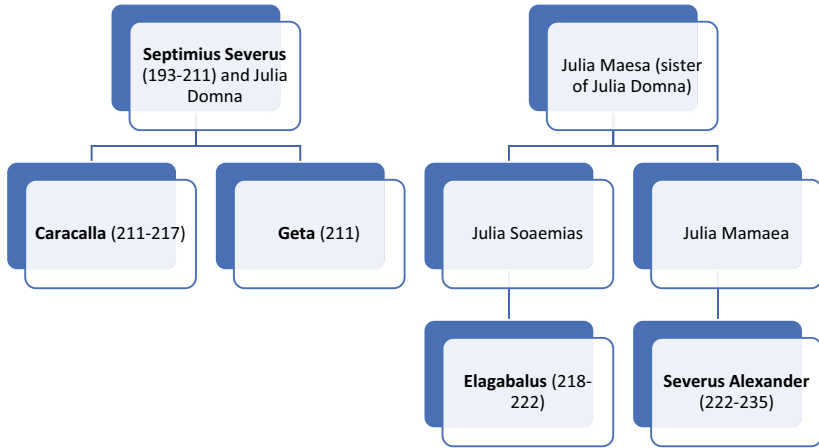
¹²⁰ See Potter (2004, 510) or Halsberghe (1972, 173). To complicate matters further, there are points of convergence not only between Mithraism and the cult of Sol Invictus, but also between these cults and Zoroastrianism, the state religion of the Neo-Persian Empire, in which the god Mithra also played an important role. See Berrens (2004, 25).

¹²¹ Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 81.

¹²² Mattingly, Sydenham, and Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume IV, Part II*, 24.

¹²³ 12 March is the date given by Birley (2002, 194), Potter (2004, 157), and Goldsworthy (2009, 81); Kienast (1996, 172) says 11 or 12 March; Campbell (2008a, 22) claims 13 March; Southern (2004, 59) suggests it was as early as 6 March.

¹²⁴ Herod. V, 8, 9.



Genealogical Chart 3.1 The Severan dynasty

to all subsequent emperors that sensitivity would be advisable in religious matters (Genealogical Chart 3.1).

The new emperor changed his name to *Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus* and would thereafter be known to posterity as Severus Alexander.¹²⁵ Obviously, at 13, the emperor was of too tender an age to really rule, but ultimately this was of little consequence as Julia Maesa again took matters into her own hands, once again with the assistance of the boy emperor's mother, this time Julia Mamaea (who chose 16 advisers from the senate to guide him).¹²⁶ The first acts of Alexander's reign included the removal of Elagabalus' people from the state apparatus and the restoration of religious affairs to their former glory. Ulpian (Domitius Ulpianus), one of Rome's great legal authorities, was named a praetorian prefect.¹²⁷ This appointment can be viewed as part of a trend started under the Severan dynasty, and perhaps stretching back to the second half of the second century, where the praetorian

¹²⁵ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 177. Only Potter (2004, 163) inverts this emperor's name as "Alexander Severus".

¹²⁶ Herod. VI, 1, 2.

¹²⁷ *HA, Alex. Sev.* 15, 6; *Eutr.* VIII, 23. Zosimus (I, 11) even claims that Ulpian was made sole praetorian prefect (there were usually two).

prefect's responsibilities had grown beyond the mere command of the guard to the extent where they included various administrative powers. This meant that the office was now suited more to a man of law than a man of war.¹²⁸ We have already seen that Macrinus, Caracalla's praetorian prefect, was also a jurist, though hardly a celebrated one. Under Septimius Severus, however, this position had been held by Papinian (Aemilius Papinianus), and later, under Severus Alexander, it would be held by Julius Paulus (from 228 to 235). These two and Ulpian stand at the pinnacle of late classical Roman law. When the *Digest* of juristic writings was compiled during the reign of the emperor Justinian (527–565), more than half of this extensive compendium consisted of quotations from Ulpian, Papinian, and Paulus.¹²⁹ And yet, no matter how excellent a jurist's reputation, this was no shield against political vicissitudes or insubordination among the troops. We have already seen that Papinian met his end during Caracalla's purges after disposing of Geta; now Ulpian, after only a year in office and doing his best to right the wrongs of the previous regime, was murdered by the rebellious praetorians.¹³⁰ Ambushed in the dark of night, Ulpian fled to the imperial palace, seeking the protection of the emperor and his mother. To no avail: the praetorians killed him before the emperor's eyes. The only perpetrator the emperor was able to punish was the rebellion's ringleader, Epagathus, and only then after some time had passed: to prevent riots in Rome, Epagathus was first dispatched to Egypt as the new governor, where he was arrested, then conducted to Crete and put to death.¹³¹

While the praetorians had always played a prominent role within the empire, their power and influence had previously been concentrated in the hands of their prefects, not the soldiers themselves. The fact that Severus Alexander was a weak ruler did not translate into a further rise in the praetorians' power, but it did plunge Rome itself into chaos and political instability, even though the emperor had surrounded himself with

¹²⁸ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 11.

¹²⁹ Bartošek, *Dějiny římského práva ve třech fázích jeho vývoje*, 249; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 158. Cf. Honoré, *Justinian's Digest*, 6: "A reader of the Digest is primarily reading a selected and revised version of Ulpian's writings [...]. Ulpian's work is central to the Digest".

¹³⁰ Probably in the spring of 223 (Southern 2004, 60) or in the late summer of the same year (Potter 2004, 165).

¹³¹ See Dio LXXX, 2, 2–4; cf. Zos. I, 11.

experienced advisers and, despite his youth, tried to govern responsibly. Insurrection among the praetorians and the breakdown of discipline in their ranks also affected the life of the historian and senator Cassius Dio. Earlier, the praetorians had complained to Ulpian about Dio because, while governor of Pannonia, he had ruled the garrison there with a strong hand, and they were worried that something similar might happen to them. Ulpian, however, refused to recall Dio, who continued to be held in high esteem further on in the reign of Severus Alexander; in 229 he even held a regular consulship with the emperor. What Dio himself writes about this matter at the end of his history defies belief. The emperor is said to have advised Dio that he would be better off spending the time of his consulship outside Rome, as he was unable to guarantee him protection from the praetorians!¹³² If even the praetorians were beyond the emperor's control, Severus Alexander would surely struggle for a stable footing in the future.

Although the empire was weakened to its very core by this major problem, the surrounding world was not a hostile place and peace prevailed in the provinces. Until, that is, there was a change in Parthia's ruling dynasty. It was not just that the Parthian king Artabanus V was overthrown by Ardashir, his vassal from Persis (the present-day Iranian province of Fars). Worse, Ardashir founded an entirely new dynasty with designs on dominating not only all the territories that had belonged to the Arsacids, but also all the lands that had been part of the First Persian (or Achaemenid) Empire in the 6th–fourth centuries BCE and now belonged to Rome—mainly the Syro-Palestinian region, Asia Minor and Egypt. In other words, all of the Roman East. Thus, during Severus Alexander's reign, the Parthian Empire was replaced by the far more pugnacious Neo-Persian Empire and the Arsacid dynasty gave way to the Sasanian dynasty. Ardashir, whose name was transcribed into Greek and Latin as Artaxerxes, spent the initial years of his reign consolidating his power¹³³ until, in 230, he was ready to launch his first attack on the Roman East, starting with Roman Mesopotamia.¹³⁴ The emperor, having no choice but to confront him head on, left Rome in the spring of 231 and marched east

¹³² Dio LXXX, 4–5. It is here that we part ways with Cassius Dio, who had dutifully related the history of the Roman Empire up to this point.

¹³³ The chronology of the New Persian Empire's first kings is uncertain. Ardashir probably reigned from 224 to 240. See Frye (2006, 178), Southern (2004, 61).

¹³⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 166; Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 91.

across the Balkans. The next year, having rallied his troops at Antioch, he mounted a three-pronged invasion of Persian territory, but our sources disagree on the outcome of the clashes.¹³⁵ Modern historical scholarship is rather of the view that this was an indecisive encounter, as the Romans certainly succeeded in blunting the Persians' offensive power, but only temporarily and at the cost of both suffering and inflicting heavy losses.¹³⁶ The emperor returned to Antioch without making peace with Ardashir.

Back in Antioch, the emperor was informed of the threat posed to borders along the Rhine and Danube by the Germanic peoples, especially the Alamanni. He spent September 233 in Rome celebrating his triumph over Persia, and in 234 he set out on his Germanic campaign. From his base in Mainz, he initially engaged successfully in battle with the Germani, but then decided to negotiate with his enemies and, if possible, buy peace from them. This did not sit well with the troops from the garrisons on the Rhine and Danube that Alexander had previously taken with him to the East. They had already found it hard to bear the devastation of their homeland and the slaughter of their families, and here was their emperor actually planning to pay the enemy for having attacked Roman territory. The discontent this bred within the army spilled over into a revolt spearheaded by C. Julius Verus Maximinus, a veteran soldier in charge of training recruits from Pannonia. Maximinus was proclaimed emperor by his soldiers.¹³⁷ The rebellion spread rapidly, and in late February or early March 235 officers sent by Maximinus assassinated Severus Alexander and his mother, who had accompanied him on his military campaigns,

¹³⁵ The *Historia Augusta* (*Alex. Sev.* 55) skimps over the expedition to Persia in a few vague sentences, but claims that Alexander won a great victory. Eutropius (VIII, 23) and Aurelius Victor (24, 2) make the same assertion. Zosimus and Cassius Dio make no mention of how the campaign played out, although several sentences right at the end of Dio's work criticise the state of the Roman army in the East at the time of Ardashir's attack (Dio LXXX, 4, 1–2). Herodian (VI, 5–6) alone offers a detailed account. He arrives at an inescapable conclusion: the Romans, having lost most of their army, were defeated, and their only consolation was that the enemy had suffered losses on much the same scale.

¹³⁶ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 61–62; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 166–167; Campbell, "The Severan Dynasty", 25–26; Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 91.

¹³⁷ Herod. VI, 8. Maximinus, following tradition, is said to have refused to assume the purple, though in all probability this was simply for appearance's sake (he was engaging in *refutatio imperii*).

in Mainz. By then, the young emperor had been abandoned by everyone anyway.

Maximinus had been a common soldier. The story is that he was originally a shepherd, then joined the army and, thanks to Septimius Severus' reforms, was able to rise from the lowest rank to legion commander and the equestrian order. He is given the epithet Thrax ("the Thracian") because, quite logically, he was born in Thrace. After Macrinus, he was the second *equus* on the throne (though, unlike Macrinus, he was not a praetorian prefect, nor had he held any other important office in the previous emperor's government). He is also the first emperor whose Roman origins were doubted,¹³⁸ and the first real soldier to be made emperor. Although the third century is commonly referred to as the "century of barracks emperors", Maximinus—a third of the way in—was actually the first.

Contrary to the established practice, Maximinus did not go to Rome after his election to receive formal confirmation of his power from the senate. Although the new emperor was recognised by the senate, he evidently had no allies in the capital. This is likely to have been the main reason why Maximinus never visited Rome.¹³⁹ Instead, for virtually the whole of his reign he remained at the empire's northern frontier, doing what he did best: waging war on the barbarians. In 235, the first year of his rule, he and his army successfully entered the territory of the Germani beyond the Rhine. The next year, he moved further east and fought the Germani, Sarmatians, and Dacians on the Danube. In 237, he refocused on the Sarmatians and Dacians. His base for these wars along the Danube was the city of Sirmium (present-day Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia).¹⁴⁰

Eusebius writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* that Christians were persecuted under Maximinus. Though only church leaders were supposed to

¹³⁸ Our sources agree that Maximinus came from Thrace and was of low birth. But that is where the consensus ends. *HA* (*Maxim.* 1, 5–7) and Jordanes (*Get.* 83, *Rom.* 281) say that Maximinus' father was a Goth called Micca, while his mother was Alanic and named Hababa (*HA*) or Ababa (Jordanes). This cannot be true: while Goths do turn up near Thrace under Maximinus' reign, they were certainly not there at the time of his birth. Herodian (VI, 8, 1) more reasonably submits that Maximinus was of Thracian origin.

¹³⁹ Potter (2004, 168) concluded that going to war with the Germani may have been a less perilous prospect for him than gracing Rome with his presence. Campbell (2008a, 30) agrees. Southern (2004, 65) says that, even so, the least he could have done was send his people to try to win over at least some of the senate.

¹⁴⁰ Campbell, "The Severan Dynasty", 30.

be singled out,¹⁴¹ sources closer to the time inform us that, rather than keeping to the government-ordered targeted persecution of the clergy, pagans instead perpetrated spontaneous attacks on Christians in the general hysteria that followed earthquakes in the provinces of *Cappadocia* and *Bithynia et Pontus* during Maximinus' reign.¹⁴² This reflects the pagan population's ingrained attitude towards Christians who, universally unpopular, were suspected of engaging in various crimes. Their reluctance to participate in the local urban community's social life hardly helped them to make friends either. Besides, they were considered atheists, with some justification, in that they rejected all recognised deities and declared them to be demons. As far as the pagan population was concerned, such effrontery could provoke the gods' wrath, which was manifested, for example, in plague, famine, and, as here, earthquakes.¹⁴³ Real, true government-mandated persecution was not inflicted on Christians until the reign of the emperor Decius.

Maximinus' power was definitely not underpinned by the upper classes, but he did not enjoy the support of the lower classes either. The emperor needed money to fight his wars and to keep the promise he had made to his soldiers upon election, i.e. that they could look forward to generous financial gifts from him. This is why he levied taxes so ruthlessly. Not only that, but with existing receipts no longer enough to cover the army's needs, Maximinus resorted to extra taxes. His support was therefore always limited to soldiers, and even then only to those under his direct command.¹⁴⁴ For example, he could not be sure of the loyalty of the Eastern troops. This proved to be a problem when, in 236, Ardashir exploited the political situation in the empire to capture the key cities of

¹⁴¹ Euseb. *HE* VI, 28.

¹⁴² Clarke (2008, 623–624) quotes a letter from 256, written to this effect by the bishop Firmilian to Cyprian, and rejects Eusebius' claim (by observing that there was “no universal proscription of church leaders as Eusebios posits”). The text of the letter is also mentioned by Lee (2000, 48–49). Similarly, a few isolated instances of martyrdom can be found during the reign of Septimius Severus; however, nor can these be described as being in consequence of persecution (Clarke 2008, 617–620).

¹⁴³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 32.

¹⁴⁴ Even among the Rhine legions that had lifted Maximinus to power, however, two usurpers (a certain Magnus and a one Quartinus) emerged as early as the spring of 235, though their rebellions were nipped in the bud (Herod. VII, 1, 5–10; Kienast 1996, 186–187).

Nisibis, Carrhae, and perhaps also Rhesaina and Singara.¹⁴⁵ Maximinus had no immediate way of responding. All he could do at the time to consolidate his position was to declare his son Maximus *caesar* in 236.¹⁴⁶

By 238, the Romans, at least in the province of *Africa Proconsularis*, had had enough of the emperor's financial policy. In March, rioting erupted in the city of Thysdrus (present-day El Djem, Tunisia) and the local procurator, who had been collecting the extra taxes on Maximinus' orders, was killed.¹⁴⁷ Fearing Maximinus' vengeance, the Thysdrians then proclaimed their provincial governor, the senator Gordian, emperor. Gordian, who was in his seat at Carthage, accepted the imperial title on condition that, as he was by now about 80 years old, they would let him rule together with his son of the same name.¹⁴⁸ The two Gordians at once reported this news to the senate in Rome, which promptly approved the election of them both and declared Maximinus an enemy of the state. At the same time, the praetorian prefect Vitalian, known to be loyal to Maximinus, was killed in Rome, and the senate sent out an appeal to all the provinces to join the revolution; according to Herodian, most of them heeded the call.¹⁴⁹ At this point, two important events occurred. Everyone had been expecting the first: Maximinus marched in all haste from Sirmium and soon stormed into Italy. The second was unforeseen, and all the more unpleasant for it: the governor of Numidia, Capelianus, who held a personal grudge against Gordian, refused to join the revolt. What was worse, Numidia bordered on Africa and, unlike that province, had an army; Capelianus and his troops marched on Carthage. Realising the situation was hopeless, the elder Gordian hanged himself and the younger fell in the Battle of Carthage, at which *Legio III Augusta* crushed Gordian's hastily assembled and poorly armed followers.

Like the rebellious Thysdrians, the senators in Rome now realised that they had no alternative but to persevere with their revolt against Maximinus. The two Gordians were deified and the senate appointed

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 30. Goldsworthy (2009, 92) lists Nisibis, Carrhae, and Edessa.

¹⁴⁶ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 185.

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 31; Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 92. Kienast (1996, 188) says it was January.

¹⁴⁸ Herod. VII, 5; *HA, Gord.* 9.

¹⁴⁹ Herod. VII, 7, 6. The chronology here is uncertain. Southern (2004, 66) suggests early April; Potter (2004, 170) thinks it might have been earlier, in March.

a committee of twenty former consuls to select a new emperor from their midst. In the end, two were chosen: Marcus Clodius Pupienus Maximus and Decimus Caelius Calvinus Balbinus. The thinking behind this is not clear: perhaps it was intended to recall the former glory of the republic, when two consuls ruled the state, or maybe the senators were simply unable to agree on a single candidate. The praetorians and the Roman people responded by forcing them to co-opt the 13-year-old son of Gordian I's daughter, Gordian III, who was made *caesar*.¹⁵⁰

However, the senate's prospects looked bleak. Pupienus and Balbinus distrusted each other, and the hastily raised senate army—much like the regiment of volunteers assembled earlier by Gordian II in Africa to fight Capelianus—was not worthy of the name; it would fold in a clash with Maximinus' army, which was larger and had been hardened by fighting the barbarians. Their one lucky break was that Maximinus' march on Rome had run into difficulties. The great city of Aquileia, which lay in his path, had closed its gates to him. This is where Maximinus made a mistake: instead of sending at least part of his army on to Rome, he decided to besiege Aquileia with all his troops. The city, however, was well stocked with supplies, and its defences were capably commanded by the senators Crispinus and Menophilus. Maximinus' soldiers, on the other hand, found themselves suffering from morale-sapping hunger and disease after just a few weeks. In the end, the soldiers of *Legio II Parthica*, who normally had a garrison—and hence families—in Alba, near Rome, decided to act. They killed the emperor and his son Maximus, and the entire army then defected to the side of the senatorial emperors.¹⁵¹ This did not bring the civil war to an end, however, as unrest had flared in

¹⁵⁰ *HA, Gord.* 22; *Maxim.* 20. Herodian (VII, 10, 7) mentions this as an initiative of the people alone, not the praetorians. Estimates of when the election took place vary from February (Kienast 1996, 195) to late April or the beginning of May (Campbell 2008a, 32).

¹⁵¹ Herod. VIII, 5, 9; *HA, Maxim.* 23, 6; Zos. I, 15; *Epitome* 25, 2. Some sources provide rather confusing accounts of the events of 238 (Aur. Vict. 27, 4; Eutr. IX, 1; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 238; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 19, 2). As for the timing, again we can take our pick of several suggestions: mid-April (Kienast 1996, 183), early May (Potter 2004, 170), or early June (Campbell 2008a, 33). Maximinus and his son suffered *damnatio memoriae*.

Rome, dwindling the number of emperors even further: the Praetorians killed Pupienus and Balbinus and elevated young Gordian to *augustus*.¹⁵²

As Gordian III was obviously too young to rule in anything but name, the praetorian prefect Gaius Furius Sabinus Aquila Timesitheus took over affairs of state for him. Timesitheus also happened to be Gordian's father-in-law, having married his daughter to the emperor in 241. In this situation, the duties of praetorian prefect were divided between two men; the other prefect, not nearly as prominent at this point in time, was Gaius Julius Priscus. Timesitheus, as *de facto* regent, was confronted with no end of problems, the first of which was on the Lower Danube.

It was during the reign of Pupienus and Balbinus that the first recorded Gothic invasion of Roman territory took place. The town of Histria, lying near the Danube estuary on the coast of the Black Sea, was sacked. Parallel to this, the province of *Moesia Inferior* (Lower Moesia) was attacked by the Carpi.¹⁵³ These tribes appear to have exploited the fact that Maximinus had taken his army out of Sirmium to march on Rome (which suggests that the attack took place in the spring). After Maximinus' death, Tullus Menophilus, the senator who had led the defence of Aquileia, was handed the governorship of Lower Moesia and tasked with resolving the situation (most likely in the second half of 238). Menophilus' remedy was to pay the Goths a regular subsidy for non-aggression, while denying the Carpi the same. When the Carpi envoys complained to him, asserting that they were stronger than the Goths, Menophilus laughed and promised to bring the matter to the emperor. Regardless of whether the Carpi as a whole actually possessed greater strength, the governor evidently assumed their claims were an attempt to ramp up their bargaining power to the effect that, if the Carpi were also to receive money, they would have to be given considerably more than the Goths. In fact, this was probably the reason he rejected them: if Maximinus had had a problem with finances, then Gordian III was now likely in the same predicament, too. It

¹⁵² On the question of chronology, we are again left to speculate, as only Zonaras (XII, 17) reports on how long Pupienus and Balbinus reigned: the choices we are given are either 22 days or not quite three months. They are thus likely to have been assassinated in July.

¹⁵³ *HA, Max, et Balb.* 16, 3 (*sub his pugnatum est a Carpis contra Moesos. fuit et Scythici belli principium, fuit et Histriae excidium eo tempore, ut autem Dexippus dicit, Histricae civitatis*). The *Historia Augusta* mentions "Scythians", but Peter the Patrician (see below) clearly identifies them as Goths. See Kulikowski (2007, 18), Doležal (2008, 86).

is surely no coincidence that silver coinage experienced another phase of decline under Gordian III. In the circumstances, Menophilus strung out the negotiations, constantly referred the envoys to the emperor's decisions, and made sure that they saw the full force of the Roman army in Moesia. He plainly knew what he was doing when he eventually sent the envoys home empty-handed because, for the next three years that Menophilus was in office, the Carpi really did keep the peace.¹⁵⁴

Another problem was the usurpation by a certain Sabinianus in Carthage in 240, though by the end of that year this revolt had been crushed.¹⁵⁵ Which left the Persians as the number-one concern. When Shapur I (Greek *Sapores*, Latin *Sapor*) succeeded his father Ardashir in 240,¹⁵⁶ he continued the offensive against the Roman Empire. Timesitheus, once he had made preparations, set off for the East with the emperor and the army in 242. En route, he stopped at the Lower Danube to defeat unspecified barbarians, probably Goths, and expel them from Thrace.¹⁵⁷ The emperor and his prefect wintered in Antioch, before launching a retaliatory strike against the Persian Empire in the spring of 243. The offensive was initially successful, as Carrhae and Nisibis were recaptured and, at the Battle of Rhesaina (present-day Ras al-Ayn, Syria), the Persian king's army was defeated.¹⁵⁸ The Romans thus reconquered the provinces of *Osroene* and *Mesopotamia*. But then, in late 243, Timesitheus was taken ill and died.¹⁵⁹ Julius Priscus, his colleague, nominated

¹⁵⁴ Peter the Patrician, fig. 8 (*FHG* 4, 186). In his dealings with the Carpi envoys, Menophilus spoke of the emperor, not emperors, which tells us that, by now, he was acting on behalf of Gordian III alone, not the senatorial emperors. And yet, in 241, Menophilus was recalled for reasons unknown. See also Goldsworthy (2009, 110), Campbell (2008a, 33–35), Southern (2004, 222). Potter (2004, 229–230) goes so far as to say he was executed, but is subsequently more cautious, cf. Potter (2006, 156) (“probably executed”).

¹⁵⁵ *HA, Gord.* 23, 4; *Zos.* I, 17, 1.

¹⁵⁶ According to Frye (2006, 178), Shapur probably ruled between 240 and 270, but Southern (2004, 235) notes that “Ardashir died in 241”.

¹⁵⁷ *HA, Gord.* 26, 4 (*quidquid hostium in Thraciis fuit, delevit, fugavit, expulit atque summovit*). In all probability, it was also at this time that the Romans recruited the “Germani and Goths” who went to war against the Persians and are mentioned by the victorious Shapur on his inscription (*Res gestae divi Saporis* 3, in Frye, 1983, 371).

¹⁵⁸ Nisibis and Carrhae: *Zon.* XII, 18. Drinkwater (2008, 35) adds Edessa and Singara to this list of achievements.

¹⁵⁹ *Zos.* I, 18, 2; *HA, Gord.* 28, 6.

his own younger brother Marcus Julius Philippus (Philip) to the emperor as Timesitheus' successor.¹⁶⁰ The two brothers were bent on taking control of the empire and the still-young (18-year-old) emperor. The campaign continued, heading south towards Ctesiphon.¹⁶¹ It was not far from this seat of the Persian kings, at the Battle of Misiche (present-day Fallujah, Iraq), that the Roman army was defeated (probably in February 244). Worse still, the emperor lost his life.

While it is not entirely clear how Gordian died, literary sources are absolutely certain that the praetorian prefect Philip orchestrated a conspiracy and that the emperor was assassinated by his own soldiers.¹⁶² Shapur's inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis (known as *Res gestae divi Saporis*), on the other hand, tells us that the emperor died in battle.¹⁶³ When all is said and done, the emperor is unlikely to have been in dangerous proximity to the battle, not to mention the fact that our sources agree that the tombstone erected to the emperor stood somewhere else entirely—up the Euphrates more than 400 km to the north-west. While we cannot be sure of the details, following their defeat the Romans evidently retreated to Roman territory, where the disgruntled soldiers, perhaps egged on by Philip, killed their emperor.¹⁶⁴ The tombstone stood close to Circesium, a town at the confluence of the Euphrates and the Khabur in present-day Syria, near a settlement called

¹⁶⁰ Huttner (2008, 187) is unsure which of the two brothers became praetorian prefect first.

¹⁶¹ Bleckmann, *Die Reichskrise des III. Jahrhunderts*, 73.

¹⁶² Aur. Vict. 27, 8; *Epitome* 27, 2; Eutr. IX, 2; *HA, Gord.* 30; Festus 22; Zos. I, 19, 1; Zon. XII, 18.

¹⁶³ *Res gestae divi Saporis* 3–4. The text is trilingual (Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek). The inscription is translated by Frye (1983, 371).

¹⁶⁴ At any rate, the events were probably dramatic. Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, also took part in the expedition. His pupil Porphyry, in his biography of his teacher (*Vita Plotini* 3), mentions that after Gordian's death Plotinus "saved himself by the skin of his teeth when he fled to Antioch".

Zaitha.¹⁶⁵ Eutropius, however, recounts that it was actually only a cenotaph, since the emperor's body, or rather his ashes, were taken to Rome for burial.¹⁶⁶ The emperor was also deified.¹⁶⁷

In the spring of 244, the soldiers elected a new emperor: Philip,¹⁶⁸ known to posterity as Philip the Arab, who, in the words of Zosimus, “came from a nation of the most wretched Arabs” and was of low birth.¹⁶⁹ Information about his life and reign is scant.¹⁷⁰ Philip, knowing that he was in a precarious position and needed to secure his rule by making his way to Rome with all haste, bought peace from Shapur for half a million *aurei*.¹⁷¹ This was a one-off payment made on condition

¹⁶⁵ The tombstone is mentioned in the *Historia Augusta* (*Gord.* 34, 2–5) and the *Epitome* (27, 3). Most importantly, Ammianus Marcellinus saw it with his own eyes during the emperor Julian's Persian campaign in 363. The monument is said to have been “visible from afar” (*hic Gordiani imperatoris longe conspicuum vidimus tumulum*), and the emperor Julian himself performed a sacrifice at it (*Amm. Marc. XXIII, 5, 7–8*). Ammianus also talks of Gordian's “premeditated murder” (*insidiosum interitum*).

¹⁶⁶ Eutr. IX, 2, 3. See also Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 244. The *Epitome* (27, 3) asserts the opposite (*corpus eius prope fines Romani Persicique imperii positum*).

¹⁶⁷ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 195. See also Potter (2004, 234–236).

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, the soldiers selected Philip over his elder brother Priscus. Their choice was probably swayed by the fact that Philip had a son and hence a successor. Philip made up for this to Priscus by appointing him governor not only of Mesopotamia, but also of Syria and evidently all the other Eastern regions (the inscription *ILS 9005* calls him *rector Orientis*). In doing so, Philip made his position in the East secure.

¹⁶⁹ Zos. I, 18, 3. Low birth: *HA, Gord.* 29, 1; *Epitome* 28, 4. Despite his later epithet, “there is no reason to believe that [Philip] was not fully Roman in all important respects” (Goldsworthy 2009, 94). Aurelius Victor (28, 1), the first to refer to Philip as *Arabs*, says that his birthplace was Trachonitis (present-day Shahba, Syria), which lies about 100 km south of Damascus. Zonaras (XII, 19) misidentifies his birthplace as Bostra, an important city in Roman Arabia that, though also in Syria, is about 50 km further south (present-day Bosra, Syria). Both Zonaras and Victor correctly state that, during his reign, Philip renamed his birthplace Philippopolis and greatly improved it architecturally (modest remains still survive in Shahba). See also Ball (2000, 417).

¹⁷⁰ The biographies of Philip the Arab, Decius, Trebonianus Gallus, and Aemilian are missing from the *Historia Augusta* because it does not cover the years 244–253. Philip is briefly mentioned by Zosimus and Zonaras and even more sparsely by Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and *Epitome*.

¹⁷¹ *Res gestae divi Saporis* 4, in Frye (1983, 371). Although Shapur himself refers to *denarii*, these must have been gold coins. See, for example, Campbell (2008a, 36), Goldsworthy (2009, 94), Potter (2004, 237); and especially Edwell (2008, 174) (“It is now generally accepted that this was a reference to gold denarii [aurei] or possibly Sasanian Persian gold dinars”). Edwell also wonders whether this money was actually

that the Romans would keep the territories that Timesitheus had recaptured. Even so, Roman influence in Armenia was lost, and Shapur had greatly strengthened both his personal power and that of his dynasty.

In the summer of 244, Philip arrived in Rome and appointed his seven-year-old son, Marcus Julius Severus Philippus, *caesar*. He did not tarry here: by 245 he was gone, his presence urgently needed in Dacia in the war against the Carpi and perhaps also the Goths. On top of that, he was grappling with Germanic tribes in the Middle Danube region.¹⁷² These campaigns kept him busy until the summer of 247, when he returned to Rome to celebrate his triumph and elevate his son to *augustus*. This was also the 1000th anniversary of the city of Rome, although the emperor appears to have waited until the next year to stage celebrations.¹⁷³

Some Christian sources assert that Philip was a Christian. Eusebius is the first to mention this, though he cannot vouch for its veracity. It is then accepted as fact by Jerome and, in turn, by other Christian authors, including Orosius, Jordanes, and Zonaras.¹⁷⁴ Needless to say, the truth of this claim is extremely unlikely.¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, this may be a way of reflecting the fact that Philip, unlike his immediate successor Decius, did not persecute Christians.

paid, given that Philip soon reneged on the peace deal. It should perhaps be added that *denarii* were no longer being minted at this time, and the Persian king would perhaps also have been reluctant to accept payment in heavily debased *antoniniani*.

¹⁷² Jordanes (*Get.* 89) claims that Philip withdrew financial support from the Goths, thereby provoking their incursions (*Gothi [...] subtracta sibi stipendia sua aegre ferentes, de amicis effecti sunt inimici*). However, it is not clear when this happened and whether they mounted their attacks while Philip was still on the throne or later, under Decius (see below). Southern (2004, 71) specifically mentions the Quadi. Only the victory titles *Carpicus maximus* and *Germanicus maximus* are documented for Philip (Kienast, 1996, 199; Peachin, 1990, 237–238).

¹⁷³ Drinkwater (2008, 37) and Goldsworthy (2009, 94) are inclined towards 21–23 April 247, but most authors lean towards 248 (Ball, 2000, 417; Bird, 1994, 126; Kienast, 1996, 198; Huttner, 2008, 198; Potter, 2004, 240; Southern, 2004, 72). The tradition of secular games is discussed at length by Zosimus (II, 1–7), who links their decline under the Christian emperors to the decline of the empire. See also Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 246 and 247; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 20, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Euseb. *HE* VI, 34, 1; Hieron. *De vir.* 54; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 20, 2; Jord. *Get.* 89, *Rom.* 283; Zon. XII, 19.

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, Southern (2004, 74). Ball (2000, 418), on the other hand, believes the claims made by the Christian sources (but unfortunately does not put forward any supporting arguments). Bowersock (1983, 125–127) attempts to find a middle ground when he concludes that Philip “dabbled in Christianity”.

Even after securing the empire's northern frontier, Philip's rule was fragile. He faced uprisings engineered by Pacatian (Claudius Marinus Pacatianus) in Moesia at the end of 248, and by Jotapian in Syria at around the same time. Although both were killed soon afterwards by their own soldiers, Zosimus recounts that Philip was horrified to learn of these revolts, and for a time is even said to have considered abdicating.¹⁷⁶ Senator Decius, however, assured him that there was nothing to fear as the rebellions would soon be put down. After he was shown to be right, the emperor sent him to the Danube to stabilise the situation there. The soldiers at the local garrisons were spooked by this special commissioner's investigation and, because they considered Decius to be a better leader than Philip had been, they offered him the emperorship. Zosimus says that Decius was initially reluctant to accept the imperial title from the troops, and with good reason, as Philip possessed greater military strength.¹⁷⁷ Philip, leaving his son in Rome, marched against Decius and clashed with him sometime in the late summer or early autumn of 249 at Verona in northern Italy. Philip was defeated and killed here.¹⁷⁸ As soon as news of Philip's death reached Rome, his 12-year-old son was murdered by the praetorians.

Gaius Messius Quintus Decius Valerinus was born in the town of Budalia (the present-day village of Martinci, Serbia) located near Sirmium in the province of *Pannonia Inferior*.¹⁷⁹ This makes Decius the first of the Illyrian emperors. As a prominent senator, he successively held

¹⁷⁶ Potter (2004, 240) dates Pacatian's revolt to the period between late 248 and April of the following year, while Kienast (1996, 201) narrows it down to a brief window in 248, with Jotapian evidently staging his revolt at the turn of 249. Both usurpers are mentioned by Zosimus (I, 20), and Jotapian is also referred to by Aurelius Victor (29, 2). They both minted coins. The usurper Silbannacus, who is not mentioned by literary sources and has left behind only two *antoniniani* bearing his name, may also have come from the time of Philip the Arab. We can only surmise that his revolt might have taken place in Gaul, since Eutropius (IX, 4) mentions that this is where Decius had to suppress an unspecified rebellion (*bellum civile*). Huttner (2008, 218), however, places his revolt in Rome in 253. Another alleged usurper named Sponsianus is even more mysterious. While coins bearing his likeness do exist, their authenticity is sometimes questioned (*ibid.*, 199). On both, see also Mattingly et al. (1949, 66–67), Kienast (1996, 202–203).

¹⁷⁷ Zos. I, 22.

¹⁷⁸ August or September according to Drinkwater (2008, 38); September according to Potter (2004, 241).

¹⁷⁹ The most precise information can be found in Eutr. IX, 4; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 251. Cf. Aur. Vict. 29, 1; Epitome 29, 1.

several important positions within the provincial administration.¹⁸⁰ He reigned from September 249 to June 251, and at the beginning of his rule the senate gave him the name Traianus, which he added to his existing names.¹⁸¹ Decius's reign is notable for the first systematic and widespread persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. It would be helpful to explore this issue in more detail and to run through the entire history of the Roman government's relationship with Christians.

As early as the end of the fourth century CE, Christian authors had established a sort of canon of ten pagan emperors who supposedly persecuted Christians: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian.¹⁸² Yet it is also worth noting that Lactantius, in a treatise dealing exclusively with the persecution of Christians from the beginning of that same century, just a few years after the legalisation of Christianity, lists only five persecuting emperors (Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian).¹⁸³ The fact of the matter is that, of the 52 pagan emperors who ruled between 14 and 305 CE, only three (Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian) engaged in the programmatic and systematic persecution of Christians, and even then not for the entirety of their reigns, but for a total of about five and a half years between them (Decius probably for 15 months, Valerian for about 2 years, and Diocletian for 2 years and 2 months). Other emperors during whose reigns there is more or less reliable evidence that they persecuted Christians are Nero, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius.

The persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire can be broken down into three phases. The first ended in 64 CE, the second lasted until

¹⁸⁰ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 204 (*legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae Moesiae itemque Germaniae Inferiorum, legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae Hispaniae Citerioris, praefectus urbi, legatus Augusti pro praetore utriusque provinciae Moesiae et Pannoniae*).

¹⁸¹ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 204 (*Imperator Caesar C. Messius Quintus Traianus Decius*). He is sometimes called "Trajan Decius" (e.g. Ball, 2000, 417; Estiot, 2012, 539).

¹⁸² When we say "Diocletian", we mean the period of the tetrarchy in general. See Oros. *Hist.* VII, 26, 9 (*decem persecutiones a Nerone usque ad Maximianum ecclesia Christi passa est*) and Aug. *civ.* 18, 52. See also Jerome's *Chronicon* on the individual emperors.

¹⁸³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 2–6 and 12–16. In Aurelian's case, Lactantius asserts that the emperor had scarcely dispatched his orders to the provinces for Christians to be persecuted before he was assassinated. For more on Aurelian's religious policy, see below.

250 CE, and the third was brought to an end by the Edict of Toleration by Galerius in 311 CE. The phases can be distinguished from each other not only by the intensity of persecution, but also by the degree to which the Roman government was involved: we know of no persecution of Christians by the Roman government until 64 CE, and of no general and widespread persecution until 250 CE.¹⁸⁴ And if we were to gloss over Nero's persecution of 64 as spontaneous acts of no major consequence that affected only a fraction of Rome's population, then there can be no question of any persecution of Christians in the first century CE.¹⁸⁵

The first real persecution of Christians in the empire is documented in the second half of the emperor Trajan's reign. Pliny the Younger, the imperial official governing the province of Bithynia, wrote his emperor letters asking questions whenever he encountered an administrative problem. By this time, Christians were already a large minority in Asia Minor.¹⁸⁶ Pliny was concerned about the high proportion of Christians in his province and asked the emperor for advice. He believed that this "contagion" (*contagio*) could yet be stopped. As far as any actual wrongdoings were concerned, Pliny conceded that he could find "nothing but perverse and exaggerated superstition".¹⁸⁷ Even so, he was convinced that Christians deserved punishment at least for "stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy" (*pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri*).¹⁸⁸ The emperor's famous, but brief, reply (the letter is a mere 83 words long) lays bare the Roman government's rigid attitude towards Christians (and the emperor's reluctance to address the issue): "They are not to be sought out; however, if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished" (*conquirendi non sunt; si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt*).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Ste. Croix, "Why were the early Christians persecuted?", 6–38.

¹⁸⁵ Although later sources mention a second wave of persecution of Christians under Domitian (Euseb. *HE* III, 20; Tert. *Apol.* 5; Lact. *mort. pers.* 3), there is no reliable evidence for this. Jones (1992, 117) says that "no convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians".

¹⁸⁶ In the mid-second century, Lucian mentions large numbers of "atheists and Christians" in Paphlagonia, the province next door to Bithynia (*Alexander* 25).

¹⁸⁷ Plin. *ep.* X, 96, 8 (*nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam*).

¹⁸⁸ Plin. *ep.* X, 96, 3. Other writers made and expressed similar observations about the Christians (Epictetus, *Discourses* IV, 7, 6; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* XI, 3).

¹⁸⁹ Plin. *ep.* X, 97.

The persecution of Christians remained isolated and localised. For the most part, emperors avoided this issue, but in those cases where they did address it, they left it up to the provincial governors to take any action against the Christians. The Roman government's reluctance to deal with the problem in any way persisted until the middle of the third century.¹⁹⁰ It was only under Decius that there was a change. Soon after consolidating his power, Decius sent instructions to all the provincial governors on the sacrifices that all the inhabitants of the empire had to perform in order to gain the gods' favour and thus their protection over the empire.¹⁹¹ However, people were free to choose which specific gods they would offer their sacrifices to. The sacrifice was symbolic—no more than a libation and a taste of the sacrificial meal. The authorities purposely sought out bishops (hardly difficult, as they were quite openly public figures), not to put them to death, but to ensure that they set an example to their flock and shepherded them to the pagan altars. Every inhabitant who performed a sacrifice to the gods in the temple was given a certificate as proof (a *libellus*).¹⁹² The checks were effective because they used the bureaucratic apparatus that was already in place for collecting taxes. Many Christians, fearing for their lives, gave in to the pressure and offered sacrifices; this made them apostates (*lapsi*) in the eyes of the church. Others bribed local officials and collected their *libellus* without a sacrifice (to little avail—the church authorities still viewed them as *lapsi*). Many fled and went into hiding¹⁹³; others refused to make the sacrifice and were

¹⁹⁰ Marcus Aurelius' rule may be an exception here. See McLynn (2009, 287–305).

¹⁹¹ As neither Zosimus nor other pagan authors mention this persecution (and there is no biography of Decius in the *HA*), we are reliant on Christian authors here. Eusebius (*HE* VI, 39, 1) says that Decius ordered the persecution “on account of his hatred of Philip”; this view is repeated by Jerome (*Chron.* s. a. 252: *Decius cum Philippos, patrem et filium, interfecisset, ob odium eorum in Christianos persecutionem movet*), Jordanes (*Rom.* 284) and Zonaras (XII, 20). However, we do not know what Decius truly thought of Philip. This hatred would be conceivable if Decius had ordered Philip's *damnatio memoriae*, but we do not know even if he did that. Potter (2004, 209 and 244) favours this interpretation, but Kienast (1996, 198) is not so sure. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 4, 1–2) does not concern himself with the reasons, simply stating that Decius persecuted Christians because he was a bad person (*malus*).

¹⁹² There are 45 extant certificates from Egypt (Clarke, 2008, 625). Examples are provided by Lee (2000, 51).

¹⁹³ The authorities did not go out of their way to hunt these runaways down, but relied instead on informers, who appear to have concentrated on wealthy and prominent Christian fugitives (Clarke, 2008, 631).

punished in various ways: they were imprisoned, deprived of their property and banished, tortured, or put to death. As anticipated, one of the first casualties was the Roman bishop Fabian (who died 20 January 250), but there were victims from all walks of life across the empire.¹⁹⁴

One well-known case concerns Pionius the Presbyter of Smyrna, about whom we have been left a detailed account.¹⁹⁵ Pionius and several of his companions, arrested on 23 February 250, were unsuccessfully urged to participate in a sacrifice. After Pionius had spent some time in prison in Smyrna, he was interrogated by the proconsul of Asia himself, Quintillianus, who tried to persuade him to make a sacrifice to all the gods in existence, including his own, arguing that if Pionios, as a Christian, worshipped an invisible god, and hence air, then surely he could offer a sacrifice to the air if nothing else! When his cajoling failed, he ordered him to be burned alive. The sentence was summarily carried out (on 12 March 250).

When Pionios was taken away for his first interrogation after his arrest, he walked through the *agora*. Here, among the other inhabitants of the town, local Jews gathered to mock him. The Jews had been exempted from the obligation to offer a sacrifice and could now gloat over the trouble the Christians were in.¹⁹⁶ Judaism had been an officially sanctioned religion (*religio licita*) from the very beginning of the empire. The sheer size of the Jewish population,¹⁹⁷ its presence in Rome and other cities within the diaspora, and above all the antiquity of Judaism had prompted the emperor Augustus to allow the Jews to maintain their ancient customs.¹⁹⁸ The Sabbath was respected and synagogues were

¹⁹⁴ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 74; Clarke, “Third-century Christianity”, 625–635.

¹⁹⁵ *Acta Pionii*. For the text and an English translation, see Musurillo (1972, 136–167). See also Lee (2000, 51–61).

¹⁹⁶ During his incarceration, however, Pionius mentioned in his speech to other Christians that he had heard of Jews inviting Christians into their synagogues; perhaps this is an allusion to the fact that some local Jews were trying to hide Christians from persecution (Clarke, 2008, 627, footnote 105).

¹⁹⁷ For example, Wilken (1984, 113) estimates that in the early empire there were 4–6 million Jews (out of a total population of 60 million), while Gruen (2002, 15) suggests that, in the same period, there were 20–60 thousand Jews in Rome alone.

¹⁹⁸ Feldman (1993, 92–106) provides an overview of what the Roman emperors from the time of the Principate thought of Jews.

declared sacrosanct; robbing them was tantamount to sacrilege.¹⁹⁹ All of this was tolerated despite the fact that the Jews did not recognise the existence of any gods other than their own (whose image, moreover, they were forbidden from depicting) and were routinely accused of “atheism”.²⁰⁰ Augustus’ stance was largely dictated by that of Julius Caesar, who—as part of his restructuring of the East in 47 BCE—granted the Jews many privileges.²⁰¹ The emperor Claudius also continued this policy and reaffirmed the rights bestowed on the Jews. He himself is said to have stated that he did so at the behest of his friend Herod Agrippa I, king of Judea (who had supported Claudius in his seizure of power in 41 CE, and to whom the emperor was therefore indebted). The Roman state remained constant in this stance even when conflicts arose between the Jewish and non-Jewish population,²⁰² and despite the First Jewish–Roman War (66–73) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135). Christianity’s triumph in late antiquity changed little in this respect: laws repeatedly assured Jews religious freedom and privileges, sought to curb the religious hatred shown towards them by Christian zealots, and guaranteed them protection from such fanatics’ attacks. On the other hand, in the fourth and fifth centuries, legislators also pushed for the isolation of the Jews in a Christianising society and tried to prevent their communities from growing and gaining influence (in particular, Jews were not permitted to win over new Christian followers; on the contrary, they were encouraged to embrace Christianity).²⁰³ Be that as it may, back in the times of the government-mandated persecution of Christians (under Decius, Valerian and Diocletian), Jews did not have to fear persecution.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Flav. *Ant. Jud.* XVI, 162–164.

²⁰⁰ Roman writers mostly found the Jewish religion incomprehensible and described it as “superstition” (*superstitio*); they were repulsed by the disembodied nature of the Jewish god, circumcision, indolence on the Sabbath, and the aversion to pork (e.g. see Doležal, 2015).

²⁰¹ Flav. *Ant. Jud.* XVI, 10. This was essentially a reward for the Jews’ support of Caesar during the civil war. The large Jewish attendance at Caesar’s funeral (Suet. *Jul.* 84, 5) makes sense in this light.

²⁰² For example, the attack on the Jewish community in Alexandria in 38 CE and the uprising of the Jews within the diaspora in 115–117.

²⁰³ For details on these measures, see Doležal (2015).

²⁰⁴ Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity*, 154.

Decius' acts of persecution subsided early in 251, by March at the latest—a good few months before the emperor's death. All prisoners were released, people who had been banished returned, and those who had been in hiding ventured out of their hiding places.²⁰⁵ There would continue to be isolated cases of martyrdom, but it was not until Valerian was emperor that Christians faced further systematic persecution.

Decius earned the sad distinction of being the first emperor to die in battle against the empire's enemies (to be sure, Gordian II had also fallen on the battlefield in 238, but that was in a civil war). Decius' campaign against the barbarians in the Balkans is obscure. Not only is the sequence of events and the overall course of the war a blur, but we cannot be sure of the chronology, the theatre of operation, or the forces involved either. Indeed, we do not even know for certain who Decius' opponents were: modern literature (for convenience's sake, if nothing else) calls them Goths; certain sources say they were the Scythians. The fact of the matter is that our sources are sparing in their descriptions of this war, and the only one to provide an account that is anywhere near coherent is the rather unreliable Jordanes (although Dexippus also has a go).

Dexippus (frg. 16; quoted by Syncellus) says that “the Scythians, who call themselves Goths”, crossed the Danube and besieged the city of Nicopolis ad Istrum in the province of *Moesia Inferior*. Despite inflicting heavy losses (30,000 men), Decius was still defeated. Many people then died in the barbarians' subsequent conquest of Philippopolis (present-day Plovdiv, Bulgaria). Decius, in his pursuit of the returning barbarians, was defeated and killed along with his son. In another extant fragment, Dexippus recounts the earlier unsuccessful siege of Philippopolis (frg. 20) and the equally unsuccessful siege of Marcianopolis (frg. 18), indicating that this must have been a drawn-out war involving numerous military movements throughout the north-eastern Balkans.

Jordanes, another important source, describes how, in this campaign, the Gothic leader Cniva “divided his army into two parts and sent one to ravage Moesia, knowing that the defenders had abandoned it because out of the emperors' negligence”. He probably means the eastern part of the province of *Moesia Inferior* here and is doubtless alluding to the civil war between Philip and Decius. Cniva personally led the other part of the army, reportedly 70,000 men, through the Danubian city of Oescus into

²⁰⁵ Clarke, “Third-century Christianity”, 628.

Roman territory. Once there, Cniva was repelled by the Moesian governor and future emperor Trebonianus Gallus, at which point he headed for Nicopolis, where he clashed with Decius. This battle appears to have been indecisive, as Cniva retreated to the Haemus Mons (the present-day Balkan Mountains, otherwise known as Stara Planina, Bulgaria) and then made for Philippopolis, chased by Decius. En route, the Battle of Beroe (also known as Augusta Traiana, present-day Stara Zagora, Bulgaria) was fought, where Decius suffered a heavy defeat after being ambushed by the Goths. He and his remaining troops were forced to withdraw across the Haemus Mons to Moesia. When he got here, he joined forces with Gallus and his undefeated army at Oescus. With Decius on the retreat, there was nothing in the way of Cniva's path to Philippopolis, which he eventually captured after a prolonged siege. Jordanes' claim that, at Philippopolis, Cniva and the local commander, Priscus, forged an alliance against Decius (*Priscum ducem qui inerat sibi foederavit, quasi cum Decio pugnaturum*)²⁰⁶ is questionable. Jordanes ends his account with the Battle of Abrittus, ahead of which the emperor's son Herennius Etruscus died after being struck by an arrow. Decius, though broken with grief, was determined to fire up his soldiers before the coming battle. After declaring, "let no man mourn: the death of one soldier is of no great loss to the state", he rushed upon his enemies "to seek either death or vengeance for his son". He fell when the Roman army was surrounded by the Goths.²⁰⁷ The city of Abrittus (present-day Razgrad, Bulgaria) was in the province of *Moesia Inferior*; the battle here took place in late May or

²⁰⁶ Lucius Priscus evidently proclaimed himself emperor as early as the end of 250 (Kienast, 1996, 208). Apart from Jordanes, he is mentioned only by Aurelius Victor (29, 2–3), who says he was the governor of Macedonia. He was declared an enemy of the state by the Roman senate and killed soon afterwards, but we do not know how. In fact, he was not the only usurper of Decius' reign. In Rome, with the emperor gone, the senator Julius Valens Licinianus also declared himself emperor (29 29, 3; *Epitome* 29, 5), either in the second half of 250 (Kienast, 1996, 208) or in the spring of 251 (Bird, 1994, 129).

²⁰⁷ Jord. *Get.* 101–103. Cf. Rom. 284, where Jordanes could hardly be briefer in noting that both father and son perished at Abrittus. Interestingly, Aurelius Victor (29, 5) tells a similar story: when Decius' son was killed in action, the emperor is said to have declared that the death of a single soldier meant nothing; whereupon he rushed into battle and died the same death in fierce combat. Victor would go on to use the motif of the act of self-sacrifice (called *devotio*) once more when he described Claudius Gothicus' death (see below). This manner of death is also hinted at by the author of the *HA*, *Aurel.* 42, 6 (*Decios [...] quorum et vita et mors veteribus comparanda est*); however, Decius' biography itself is missing from the *HA* collection.

early June 251.²⁰⁸ Cniva then returned unhindered to Barbaricum, laden with spoils and captives.

There is another significant, earlier passage by Jordanes describing a previous Gothic invasion of Moesia during the reign of Philip, who dispatched Decius to repel it. “Upon arriving, he was unable to gain the upper hand over the Goths, so absolved his soldiers from their oaths and sent them home, as if it were their fault that the Goths had crossed the Danube. And having thus punished, as he thought, his soldiers, he returned to Philip”.²⁰⁹ This story of Decius’ inability to defeat the Goths, if we are to give it any credence at all, may be an attempt by the Christian author Jordanes (or his sources) to denigrate Decius, who later—as emperor—persecuted Christians. However, it is much more likely a misunderstanding of the situation: that Philippus did indeed dispatch Decius to Moesia, though not against the Goths, but against the usurper Pacatian (see above). As we have seen, the soldiers proclaimed Decius emperor and, in doing so, transferred their loyalty and pledge of allegiance to him. Decius may have given the soldiers a choice at this point: either follow him into war against Philip or return home. In any case, the Danube border remained exposed, a situation the Goths exploited to invade Roman territory. The Goths, Jordanes states, were ruled by King Ostrogotha. He placed two warriors, Argaithus and Guntheric, in command of 300,000 men-at-arms, comprising Goths, Taifali, Hasding Vandals, Peucini (Bastarnae), and—as Jordanes quite particularly notes—3,000 Carpi. Their target was said to be once again Moesia, where they unsuccessfully besieged Marcianopolis. Eventually settling for a ransom, they marched back across the Danube.

There are no major discrepancies between the accounts given by Dexippus and Jordanes.²¹⁰ They agree on the failed siege of Marcianopolis, the Battle of Nicopolis and the sack of Philippopolis. Assuming Argaithus and Guntheric launched their invasion in the last year of Philip’s reign (249), the subsequent invasion by King Cniva, who succeeded

²⁰⁸ This is the date provided by Huttner (2008, 211). Drinkwater (2008, 39) believes it was the beginning of June, as does Kienast (1996, 204). Goldsworthy (2009, 103) says June.

²⁰⁹ Jord. *Get.* 90–92.

²¹⁰ Minor differences include the fact that, according to Jordanes (*Get.* 92), the Goths left Marcianopolis with a ransom (*diuque obsessam accepta pecunia ab his qui ineran reliquerunt*), but Dexippus (fig. 18) says they departed without one.

Ostrogotha, must have been in 250–251. If the 249 invasion was unsuccessful, it makes sense that the new Gothic king would decide to take command of the new expedition himself. The names of the Gothic leaders involved, though mentioned only by Jordanes, may be authentic.²¹¹ The conquest of Philippopolis is also indirectly confirmed by Zosimus and Ammianus Marcellinus; the latter even states that “a hundred thousand men – if the historical records are not invented [*nisi fingunt annales*] – were slain within its walls”.²¹²

Zosimus’ account of Cniva’s invasion (he writes nothing about the previous invasion) is very simplistic and seems to compress all events into a single year. The most striking contradiction, however, is the claim that Decius defeated the Goths in all the battles except the last one, when he was betrayed after Trebonianus Gallus colluded with the Goths and caused Decius to walk headlong into a deadly ambush in marshy terrain.²¹³ The Battle of Abrittus is similarly described by Zonaras.²¹⁴ This account is suspect. As Potter rightly points out, Trebonianus Gallus could hardly have been sizing up the imperial title and banking on the support of his soldiers if there was the slightest suspicion that he was the one responsible for the death of Decius and many of his troops.²¹⁵ Other sources do not deal with the battle in detail, mentioning only the death of father and son,²¹⁶ and some could not get even that right.²¹⁷

²¹¹ See Schönfeld (1911, 25) (Argaithus) and 119 (Guntheric). The author of the *HA* (*Gord.* 31, 1) probably drew on the same source as Jordanes, but distorted the account, condensed the two Goths into one (*Argunt Scytharum rex*), and brought the invasion forward to the end of Gordian III’s reign. In contrast, the name Cniva is far from clear; see Schönfeld (1911, 65) (“ein rätselhafter Name”).

²¹² Zos. I, 24, 2; Amm. Marc. XXXI, 5, 17.

²¹³ Zos. I, 23.

²¹⁴ Zon. XII, 20.

²¹⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 247.

²¹⁶ Amm. Marc. XXXI, 5, 15 (*occiderunt dimicando cum barbaris imperatores Decius pater et filius*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 252 (*Decius cum filio in Abritto occiditur*); Oros. *Hist.* VII, 21.

²¹⁷ Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 4, 3), for example, says that Decius fell in the campaign against the Carpi. Eutropius (IX, 4) mistakenly writes that Decius and his son died not in the Roman territory of Moesia, but in Barbaricum; Aurelius Victor (29, 4) also claims that Decius and his son pursued the barbarians across the Danube, as does *Epitome* 29, 3.

There is virtually no consensus on these events among modern scholars. For example, Kulikowski and Heather assert that there were two different invasions: one into Moesia in 249, when Argaithus and Guntheric are said to have sacked Marcianopolis (which did not happen); the other in 250, spearheaded by Cniva, when Philippopolis was taken, with the barbarians wintering in Roman territory before defeating the Romans at Abrittus in 251.²¹⁸ Wilkes, on the other hand, speculates that there was a single campaign waged between 249 and 251: Decius left the Danube after his usurpation in 249 to seize Rome, enabling the barbarians to launch a two-pronged incursion, with Cniva headed for Dacia and Argaithus and Guntheric for Philippopolis.²¹⁹ Drinkwater also speaks of a single invasion, but dates it to the year 250. This is when the Carpi are said to have invaded Dacia, then marched south and crossed the Danube, while the Goths crossed the Danube a little further east. Decius started by repulsing the Carpi and then turned his attention to Cniva, who was retreating to Philippopolis. At the time, this city was being besieged by another Gothic army. Decius was defeated, Philippopolis was lost thanks to the treachery of the Thracian governor Lucius Priscus, and the following year the Battle of Abrittus was fought.²²⁰ Potter wonders whether there was a single invasion in 250 that centred on Marcianopolis, followed by Decius' defeat at Beroe, with Philippopolis not being taken until the following year. When Decius attempted to prevent the barbarians from withdrawing northwards and tried to divest them of their spoils and captives, he was defeated at Abrittus.²²¹ In other words, Decius' campaign in the Balkans is one of the least known wars ever waged by the Romans during the imperial period. Now readers have been presented with virtually all the facts, they can make up their own minds. A few things, at any rate, are certain: Decius could not be given a proper burial because his body was never found; the names Cniva, Argaithus, and Guntheric are not mentioned ever again in the sources; and it was now that the struggle for Dacia began in earnest between the Romans and the barbarians.

²¹⁸ Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars from the Third Century to Alaric*, 18; Heather, *The Goths*, 40.

²¹⁹ Wilkes, "Provinces and frontiers", 225–256.

²²⁰ Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian and the 'crisis'", 38–39.

²²¹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 246.

At the Battle of Abrittus, Decius died with his son, who was named Herennius Etruscus and had the title of *augustus*. Although Decius had another son, the *caesar* Hostilian, whom he left behind in Rome, when it came to electing a new emperor, the army opted for the governor of (Lower?) Moesia, Trebonianus Gallus (who reigned from 251 to 253).²²² Gallus made peace with the Goths and allowed them to return to Barbaricum with their booty and captives. He also restored the tributes previously paid to them. Then, hastening to Rome, he adopted Decius' son Hostilian, elevated him to the rank of *augustus*, made his own son Volusianus *caesar*,²²³ and declared Decius a god. The stability of the empire at this time was made all the more fragile by the plague, which claimed Hostilian as one of its victims.²²⁴

The plague epidemic was not all there was to contend with; Shapur's invasion of Syria in 252–253 was just as devastating. The king started his campaign by defeating the Roman army at the city of Barbalissos, which lay near the confluence of the Euphrates and the Khabor,²²⁵ before capturing a number of cities in Syria itself, including Antioch. He made it all the way to Emesa, where local resistance brought his advances to a standstill.²²⁶ The leader of this resistance, one Uranius Antoninus, also took the opportunity to rise up against Gallus in the summer of 253, declare himself emperor, and begin minting his own coins. By all accounts, his usurpation was made possible by the local population's

²²² Kienast (1996, 209 and 212) identifies both Gallus and Aemilian as governors of the province of *Moesia Superior*, but Potter (2004, 247 and 252) believes them to be the governors of the province of *Moesia Inferior*. According to Southern (2004, 76), just Aemilian was governor of *Moesia Inferior*. Drinkwater (2008, 39 and 41) refers to them simply as governors of “Moesia”, as does Southern (2004, 75) in the case of Gallus.

²²³ Possibly in June 251 (Kienast, 1996, 207).

²²⁴ According to *Epitome* 30. Zosimus (I, 25, 1) says that Hostilian was forcibly removed by Gallus. The plague itself is mentioned by Aurelius Victor (30, 2), Zosimus (I, 26), and many other authors. Harper (2015, 246–247) suspects that it may have been an epidemic of smallpox (which was probably also behind the Antonine Plague in the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus) or, perhaps more likely, some form of viral haemorrhagic fever. It seems to have broken out in Egypt in 249, reached Italy in 251, and raged for the next two decades.

²²⁵ Shapur himself, in *Res gestae divi Saporis* 4 (Frye, 1983, 371), claims to have destroyed a Roman army of 60,000 men at the Battle of Barbalissos.

²²⁶ Zosimus I, 27; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 159–161. Edwell (2008, 184–200) offers a detailed account of Shapur's campaign. Ball (2000, 23) dates the conquest of Antioch to 256; for more on this issue, see Bleckmann (1992, 94–95).

distrust of the legitimate emperor's ability to resolve the crisis. Unfortunately for the empire, it would have to deal with situations like this several more times in its history. This revolt was not put down until 254, when the new emperor Valerian arrived in Syria to bring order to the region.²²⁷

In the meantime (in the summer of 253), Aemilian, the governor of (Lower?) Moesia, had himself proclaimed emperor by his soldiers²²⁸ and marched into Italy to confront Gallus and Volusianus. The two armies met at Interamna (present-day Terni, Italy, some 100 km north of Rome), but did not go into battle with each other because Gallus and Volusianus were killed by their own soldiers, either because they realised they were outnumbered (according to Zosimus) or thought that Aemilian might reward them (according to Aurelius Victor).²²⁹ Aemilian, however, soon met the same fate, killed by his own soldiers at Spolegium (present-day Spoleto, Italy, about 120 km north of Rome) when they discovered that the able general Valerian (whose support against Aemilian had originally been sought by Gallus) was marching against them with a mighty army. Valerian then proceeded to take control of Rome with ease, probably in September 253.²³⁰

One of Valerian's first acts in Rome immediately after his acclamation by the senate was to share the throne with his son Gallienus, whom he initially elevated to the rank of *caesar*, and soon made *augustus*. After all, Valerian was by now in his sixties, but Gallienus was still in the prime of his life at 35.²³¹ Valerian put Gallienus in charge of the West of the empire and took care of the Eastern half himself. Neither emperor stayed long in

²²⁷ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 76; Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 211; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 762.

²²⁸ While Aurelius Victor (31, 1) asserts that Aemilian became emperor after "bribing the soldiers" (*corruptis militibus*), Zosimus (I, 28, 1–2) says that he was a competent general who inflicted a resounding defeat on the Goths in Moesia. After slaughtering many of their number, he freed their captives and spearheaded the Roman army's triumphal campaign into Gothic territory. He was then proclaimed emperor by his soldiers and marched into Italy. Kienast (1996, 212) believes this would have been in July or August.

²²⁹ Zosimus I, 28, 3; Aur. Vict. 31, 2. See also Southern (2004, 78). This turn of events may have occurred in July (Drinkwater, 2008, 41) or August (Kienast, 1996, 212).

²³⁰ See Potter (2004, 252), Drinkwater (2008, 41). Kienast (1996, 214) says September or October.

²³¹ The *Epitome* (33, 3) states that he lived to be 50 years old.

Rome. On 1 January 254, they took up the consulship here together, but shortly after Valerian set off for the East, where he had to deal not only with the Persians, but also with the peoples living on the Lower Danube and along the northern edge of the Black Sea, who had started marauding the Roman provinces in those areas. Zosimus names them as the Borani, the Goths, the Carpi, and a tribe he calls the Urugundi.²³² While we are familiar with Goths and Carpi from other sources, the name Borani gives pause for thought; it may, for example, simply be a generic Greek term for Norsemen.²³³ The Urugundi, for their part, are usually identified as the Burgundians (or at least their eastern branch).²³⁴ The Borani perhaps made their first incursion, taking a nautical route across the Black Sea, in 253 or 254, followed by a second probably in 254 or 255. The chronology is very uncertain, however, because our main source, Zosimus, does not offer any dates.²³⁵ There was then a third invasion, evidently in 256, which primarily involved the Goths.²³⁶

Valerian is attested to have been in Antioch in 255 and appears to have restored order in Syria and the Eastern regions after the Persian invasion relatively quickly. However, the Borani incursions across the Black Sea are reported to have required his presence in Cappadocia in 256.²³⁷ With Valerian away, Shapur saw a chance to mount another invasion in that year. This forced the emperor back to the Eastern frontier, but only for a short time, as he returned to Rome at the end of the year.²³⁸

²³² Zos. I, 31, 1. Later, when Zosimus recounts the full-scale invasion in the reign of Claudius Gothicus (Zos. I, 42), he adds the Heruli and the Peucini (or Bastarnae) to the list.

²³³ Ridley (1982, 140) considers the Borani to be Germani.

²³⁴ E.g. Goltz and Hartmann, “Valerianus und Gallienus”, 231. Potter (2004, 246) suggests calling all these tribes invading Roman territory from the Black Sea and Lower Danubian “Scythians”, in keeping with the classicising tendencies of our sources Dexippus and Zosimus.

²³⁵ According to Drinkwater (2008, 42). Kulikowski (2007, 18) simply says these two incursions happened “at an uncertain date between 253 and 256”. Zos. I, 31–36.

²³⁶ Drinkwater, “Maximinus to Diocletian and the ‘crisis’”, 42. Heather (1996, 40) dates these three raids to 255, 256, and 257; Ridley (1982, 141) ranges them “anywhere between *c.* 255 and *c.* 259”.

²³⁷ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 214; Drinkwater, “Maximinus to Diocletian and the ‘crisis’”, 41–42.

²³⁸ Goltz and Hartmann, “Valerianus und Gallienus”, 240.

Gallienus, in the meantime, was defending the vulnerable Western *limes*, especially along the Upper Danube and the Rhine. In 254, the Marcomanni overran Pannonia, entered Italy, and made it all the way to Aquileia.²³⁹ Sometime later—perhaps in 258²⁴⁰—they forged a treaty with Gallienus, under which the Marcomannic king Attalus agreed to protect part of the Roman frontier on the Danube in exchange “for part of the territory of Upper Pannonia”; to seal the deal, Gallienus was given the king’s daughter, Pipa, as a hostage.²⁴¹ Gallienus, of course, was not surrendering this Roman territory to the barbarians, but allowed them to settle in a part of Pannonia and probably recruited Marcomannic warriors into the Roman army in the process. As for Pipa, our sources make her the emperor’s concubine (and there is even speculation in modern literature that the emperor and this Germanic woman were legally married),²⁴² but she most likely simply served as a safeguard to ensure the treaty was honoured. By taking this action, Gallienus was foreshadowing the efforts of much later emperors to exploit the potential of barbarian tribes to defend the empire.

At the beginning of 257, Valerian and Gallienus were in Rome, where they both took up their joint consulship on 1 January. In the summer of that year Valerian and Gallienus proclaimed that church leaders who refused to make a sacrifice were to be sent into exile. Upon discovering a year later, in the summer of 258, that the decree was having no effect, Valerian ordered the execution of imprisoned Christians.²⁴³ Valerian’s persecution differed from Decius’ in that it was directed specifically against Christians (whereas Decius’ did not target anyone in particular, but was merely the logical consequence of his order to sacrifice to the

²³⁹ Speidel, “Gallienus and the Marcomanni”, 73. Peachin (1990, 80), on the other hand, goes no further than guessing that Gallienus spent the years 254–256 on the Upper Danube, where he mainly fought the Alamanni. Kienast (1996, 218) makes no attempt at all to reconstruct Gallienus’ precise movements at this time.

²⁴⁰ De Blois (1976, 4) believes that Gallienus and the Marcomannic king Attalus came to their agreement after Ingenuus’ usurpation (which he places as early as 258); Speidel (2006, 73) is also minded to think they struck their pact “around 258”.

²⁴¹ *Epitome* 33, 1 (*concessa parte superioris Pannoniae*). See also Aur. Vict. 33, 6; *HA, Gall.* 21, 3.

²⁴² Speidel (2006, 76) believes that they were indeed married, but perhaps according to Germanic customs rather than Roman law.

²⁴³ Češka (2000, 29) dates Valerian’s edicts to 258 and 259, but Clarke (2008, 638 and 643) and Lee (2000, 61) believe they were issued in 257 and 258.

gods).²⁴⁴ Gallienus put a stop to the persecution of Christians after his father's death in 260.²⁴⁵

The punishments meted out to high-ranking church leaders varied and depended on many factors. The bishop of Rome, Sixtus II, was a sitting duck, so to speak, and was executed on 6 August 258.²⁴⁶ When Bishop Fructuosus of the Hispanic city of Tarraco (now Tarragona, Spain) was arrested on 16 January 259, he spent several days in prison, after which he was interrogated by the provincial governor, Aemilian, himself. He first asked him whether he had heard of Valerian and Gallienus' edict to make sacrifices to the gods. The bishop denied any knowledge of the decrees. Whereupon the governor asked, "Are you aware that the gods exist?" Fructuosus replied, "I am not". Aemilian countered, "You will find out for yourself later". Then the governor reminded him that the gods must be honoured and feared, and inquired of him tersely, "Are you a bishop?" "I am". "You were" (*Episcopus es? Sum. Fuisti.*). And he ordered that the bishop be burned alive. The sentence was carried out immediately (on 21 January 259).²⁴⁷ The only defence Christians could muster without the risk of being denounced as *lapsi* was that they were praying earnestly day and night to their god for the welfare of the empire and the emperor. When the proconsul Paternus, the governor of Africa, interrogated the local bishop, Cyprian, at Carthage on 30 August 257, this was precisely the assurance he was given. Not that it did Cyprian any good, as he was forced into exile. When he was called back a year later, he was interrogated again (on 14 September 258), this time by the new governor of Africa, Galerius Maximus. Upon discovering that there had been no change in Cyprian's beliefs, Maximus, heeding Valerian's second edict, but with the heaviest of hearts (*aegre*), ordered his beheading.²⁴⁸ Sometimes the investigators tried to understand why Christians were so obstinate in refusing to worship the gods. Eusebius reports a conversation between Aemilian, who was deputy prefect of Egypt, and Dionysius,

²⁴⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 255.

²⁴⁵ Clarke, "Third-century Christianity", 645–646.

²⁴⁶ Cypr. *ep.* 80 (according to Lee 2000, 61–63).

²⁴⁷ *Passio sanctorum martyrum Fructuosi episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi diaconorum* 2; text taken from Musurillo (1972, 177–185). See Goldsworthy (2009, 98), Clarke (2008, 592).

²⁴⁸ Clarke, "Third-century Christianity", 643. Text taken from Musurillo (1972, 168–175).

bishop of Alexandria. Aemilian asked the bishop point-blank, “Who is it that prevents you from worshipping gods who are gods by nature at the same time as this god [Jesus], assuming, of course, that he is a god? You are commanded to worship the gods known to all”. When the bishop was adamant that Christians worship only one god, Aemilian reproached him for being unreasonable and ungrateful for the kindness shown by both emperors. In this case, however, the bishop was punished only by banishment.²⁴⁹

With arrests being made all around, Valerian again went East to Antioch in 258 (or perhaps in late 257), never to return.²⁵⁰ Early in 260 Shapur mounted a further offensive. In response, the emperor gathered up an army at Edessa and set off for Carrhae in the summer of 260.²⁵¹ A battle was fought not too far from where the triumvir Crassus had been defeated by the Parthians three centuries earlier; as then, the Romans lost. During the ensuing negotiations Valerian was captured—the first time in Roman history that a Roman emperor had fallen into enemy captivity.²⁵² He was held prisoner for the remainder of his life. The rest of his army evidently surrendered, placing themselves at the mercy of the Persians. That is how this ill-fated episode is usually described by modern scholars,²⁵³ although some leave out the battle.²⁵⁴ The fact of the matter is that our sources do not agree on what happened. Lactantius, for example, makes no mention of any battle, telling us only that the emperor was captured by the Persians (*captus a Persis*), while Eusebius says that the emperor was reduced “to slavery among the barbarians”. Nor does Aurelius Victor’s account directly imply that there was a battle. Victor is the first to say that the emperor was captured by stratagem (*dolo circumventus*), but also suggests that he died soon afterwards (*interiit imperii*

²⁴⁹ Euseb. *HE* VII, 11, 6–11.

²⁵⁰ According to Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 243), Valerian probably left for the East in the autumn of 257.

²⁵¹ Kienast (1996, 214) says it was in late June.

²⁵² Older literature (e.g. De Blois, 1976, 2) sometimes cites 259 as the year of this event. This is a consequence of our sources’ ambiguity, since some of them (*HA, Valer.* 21, 5; *Aur. Vict.* 32, 5) say that Valerian was captured in the sixth year of his reign.

²⁵³ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 255–256; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 166; Ball, *Rome in the East*, 23; Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 28.

²⁵⁴ Drinkwater, “Maximinus to Diocletian and the ‘crisis’”, 42; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 79.

sexto anno). Jerome also mentions only the captivity; more specifically, he notes that the emperor was taken as a prisoner to Persia (*Valeriano in Persas ducto*). Nor does Zosimus describe any battle, only negotiations during which the emperor was captured by the king's subterfuge. Likewise, Orosius and Jordanes merely report that Valerian was captured by Shapur and remained in slavery until old age.²⁵⁵

In truth, only Eutropius, Festus, and the *Epitome* mention the battle, while the *Historia Augusta* relays to us that the emperor was captured by stratagem, but only insinuates that this came in the wake of a defeat.²⁵⁶ Shapur, as is only natural, says that he captured Valerian in battle "with his own hands"; he also tells us that the Roman army numbered 70,000 men. However, he is silent on the emperor's subsequent fate (except to mention that he had all the survivors deported to Persia).²⁵⁷ Some Roman sources even note that Shapur is said to have used Valerian as a human footstool whenever he wanted to mount his horse.²⁵⁸ Lactantius adds the outlandish story that, after his death, Valerian's skin was flayed from his body, dyed red and put on display in the temple.²⁵⁹

Having achieved this unqualified success, nothing stood in Shapur's path westwards. He probably conquered Carrhae, and perhaps also Edessa, before moving on to sack Cilicia. Eventually, as during his previous invasion,²⁶⁰ he came up against local resistance and turned back. Before he reached the Euphrates, he may have found his path blocked by an unexpected adversary, Odaenathus of Palmyra,²⁶¹ of whom more later.

²⁵⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 5, 2; Euseb. *HE* VII, 13; Aur. *Vict.* 32, 5; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 259; Zos. I, 36, 2; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 22, 4; Jord. *Rom.* 287.

²⁵⁶ Eutr. IX, 7; *Epitome* 32, 5–6. Cf. Festus 23; *HA, Valer.* 2, 1.

²⁵⁷ *Res gestae divi Saporis* 9–11, in Frye (1983, 371–372).

²⁵⁸ *Epitome* 32, 5–6; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 22, 4.

²⁵⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 5, 6. This story, in all probability apocryphal, is also told by Peter the Patrician, frg. 13 (*FHG* 4, 188).

²⁶⁰ As in 253, this resistance was linked to the usurpation of imperial power, and, as then, the act of usurpation itself took place in Emesa. Macrianus and his praetorian prefect Ballista successfully repulsed the Persians in Cilicia.

²⁶¹ Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, 220; Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 29; Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, 59. De Blois (1976, 3) even claims that part of Shapur's returning army was completely wiped out by Odaenathus (his source here is John Malalas, *Chronographia* XII, 297). Another possibility, ventured by Stoneman (1995, 106), is that Odaenathus did not attack the Persians until 262, when he recaptured the cities of Carrhae and Nisibis for the Romans.

The catastrophe befalling the Eastern army unleashed an unprecedented number of usurpations. At least some of them can be explained by the provincials' lack of confidence in the central government's ability to protect them from outside enemies. The sources leave us with the impression of utter political chaos, and the truth of the matter is that the number of usurpers really was unheard of. From Avidius Cassius' 175 revolt under the reign of Marcus Aurelius to the beginning of Elagabalus' reign in 218, there were no usurpers in the empire at all (unless we count Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus, who were rivals rather than usurpers of Septimius Severus). From 218 until Valerian's death in 260, usurpations were relatively common, averaging one every two years,²⁶² and increased even more after control of the whole empire passed to Gallienus (260–268). Then, between Gallienus' death and the accession of Diocletian, usurpations died down again.²⁶³ The sources offer scant details on most of these usurpers, many of whom have very obscure names. Not all of them have been confirmed by inscriptions or coins (although the absence of coins may mean that the usurper's rule was fleeting or that there was no mint in the area under his control). Also, as a rule of thumb, the more quickly the usurpation was suppressed, the fewer traces it left.

The most problematic usurpations are those that occurred when Gallienus reigned as sole emperor (260–268). Unfortunately, our main source here is the unreliable *Historia Augusta*, which actually devotes an entire chapter to the usurpers in these years. Of the “Thirty Tyrants” (*tyranni triginta*), several certainly never existed, others actually revolted under other emperors, and numerous alleged usurpers never even claimed imperial dignity. There were arguably “only” ten or so actual usurpers during Gallienus' reign, most of whom were responding directly to Valerian's capture by the Persians in 260.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Number of usurpations in the years 218–260: Elagabalus—4; Severus Alexander—3; Maximinus Thrax—2; Gordian III—1; Philip the Arab—5; Decius—2; Trebonianus Gallus—1; Aemilian—0; Valerian—1. Some of these usurpers may be fictitious, or their usurpation may have taken place during the reign of another emperor. Source: Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 175–217.

²⁶³ Summary: 175–218 (a 43-year timespan)—0 usurpations; 218–260 (42 years)—19 usurpations; 260–268 (8 years)—about 10 usurpations (see following note); 268–284 (16 years)—no more than 10 usurpations.

²⁶⁴ Ingenuus (260), Regalianus (260), Postumus (260–269), and Aureolus (268) were true and undeniable usurpers. We can also include Macrianus among them (although he himself did not aspire to the imperial title, but instead made his two sons, Macrianus

A special place among these usurpers is reserved for Postumus, who in 260²⁶⁵ succeeded in creating a separate state in the West that was independent of Gallienus and even survived Postumus' death. Obviously, Postumus' empire had no name,²⁶⁶ but scholars usually refer to it as the "Gallic Empire", which is rather misleading; a more correct name would perhaps be the "separatist Roman Empire in the West" or "independent Roman Empire in the West". For one thing, it encompassed a territory much larger than Gaul; for another, and more significantly, there was nothing specifically Gallic or nationalistic about it (aside from the fact, of course, that most of the power structure of Postumus' empire was probably made up of Romans born in Gaul).²⁶⁷ Postumus based his empire on all existing Roman institutions, including a pair of consuls chosen annually (he himself claimed the consulship several times), his own praetorian guard, and other attributes.²⁶⁸ Postumus made no attempt to

Minor and Quietus, emperors in the years 260–261). Others we can place on this list, though with some hesitation, are Valens (261; besides the *HA*, he is also mentioned in *Epitome* 32, 4 and *Amm. Marc.* XXI, 16, 10), Mussius Aemilianus (261–262; besides the *HA*, he is also mentioned in *Epitome* 32, 4), and perhaps Memor and Antoninus (who are mentioned only by Zosimus, I, 38, 1). For a full list of names, see *PLRE I*. For a more precise summary, see *Historia Augusta, Volume III*, translated by D. Magie, Harvard 1932, p. 65.

²⁶⁵ The question is whether Postumus' usurpation was also a reaction to Valerian's capture (as mooted by Southern, 2004, 67; Watson, 1999, 34), or whether it was a spontaneous act of military rebellion caused by some quite trivial reason (a spat over the distribution of booty—see Zonaras XII, 24). Potter (2004, 257) favours the latter interpretation and therefore places Postumus' usurpation as early as May and July 260, but Kienast (1996, 243) suggests July or August of the same year (and dates Valerian's capture to June).

²⁶⁶ The closest approximation to the name "Gallic Empire" in our sources would be the *imperium Galliarum* mentioned by Eutropius (IX, 9, 3). However, the context in which he uses it (*Victorinus postea Galliarum accepit imperium*) dictates that it can be translated only as "rule over the Gauls".

²⁶⁷ This is the argument put forward by König (1981), who makes no distinction between the emperors of the "Gallic Empire" and other usurpers, and in fact even rejects the very existence of a "Gallic Empire", asserting that Postumus and his successors actually claimed to rule the entire empire, regardless of the fact that they never attempted to conquer the rest of it, but instead subordinated their ambitions to the military interests of the Roman Empire as a whole. Drinkwater (1987, 256 et al.), on the other hand, views the "Gallic Empire" as a manifestation of mounting Celtic nationalism (conscious that Roman culture overwhelmingly dominated local customs and practices).

²⁶⁸ Postumus's title was entirely in keeping with tradition. In full, it was *Imperator Caesar Marcus Cassianius Latinus Postumus, pius felix invictus, Augustus, pontifex*

take control of the central part of the empire held by Gallienus. It is impossible to say whether this was because he lacked the resources and, anyway, was kept very busy by problems in his own territory, or because he was simply happy to make do with what he had: from the beginning he controlled Gaul (except Gallia Narbonensis), Britain, both provinces in Roman Germania, and—as of 261—Hispania. He chose Cologne as his seat, a decision that—together with the fact that he conferred the victory title of *Germanicus maximus* on himself in 261—shows that one of the priorities of Postumus’ reign was to protect Gaul from Germanic incursions. We know he had a solid power base because he survived at least one attempt by Gallienus to wrest back control of Gaul²⁶⁹ and went on to reign until 269 (when he was removed by his own people). If we were to measure the success of usurpers by the years they managed to survive and the territories they controlled, Postumus was probably the most successful usurper of the third century.²⁷⁰ The existence of Postumus’ empire prevented Gallienus from using silver mined in Britain, which may have been one of the reasons for the further debasement of silver coinage during his reign (see below); ironically, Postumus’ silver coins were of a better quality, at least initially, than those struck by Gallienus.²⁷¹

There was one other unpleasant loss the empire suffered at this time. The territory known as the *Agri Decumates* (the area between the Upper Rhine and the Upper Danube), which had been under imperial control since the Flavian dynasty and belonged to the provinces of Raetia and

maximus, pater patriae, proconsul. In addition to the occasional consulship, Postumus also claimed tribunate powers each year. His propaganda, too, was exactly what would be expected of a Roman emperor. On his coins, he represented himself as the “Restorer of Gaul” (*restitutor Galliarum*) or “Salvation of the provinces” (*Salus provinciarum*).

²⁶⁹ Southern (2004, 100) concludes that there is likely to have been one attempt in 265 or 266, and perhaps an earlier one as far back as 261. Kienast (1996, 243) and Potter (2004, 263) mention only the year 265.

²⁷⁰ Postumus’ successors in the “Gallic Empire” all ruled for a much shorter period of time. They were: Marius (269), Victorinus (269–271), and Tetricus (271–274). Postumus the usurper even had his own usurper: in 269, his general Laelianus rebelled against him in Mainz. Although Postumus quickly quashed this revolt, his own soldiers turned on him and killed him because he would not let them sack Mainz.

²⁷¹ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 355. Postumus’ coins deteriorated towards the end of his reign. Estiot (2012, 542) interprets this as the result of an influx of debased coins from areas controlled by the central government, as Postumus was forced to devalue his own coins in order to keep them in circulation (this is another instance of Gresham’s law).

Germania Superior, was abandoned by the Romans around 260 and, piece by piece, fell prey to the Alamanni.²⁷² Rather than rushing to call it “Alamannic territory”, however, we should refer to it, at least to begin with, as a no-man’s land. It is worth noting that, with forces scarce everywhere, the fate of Raetia itself and other frontier provinces was also in the balance at this time. The loss of the *Agri Decumates* was most likely a consequence of Postumus’ usurpation. From a strategic point of view, the abandonment of this territory even makes some sense: the Alps now formed the natural border between the empires of Postumus and Gallienus. In any case, the two rulers had to concentrate on defending their most important areas—Gallienus needed to defend Italy at all costs, while for Postumus it was imperative to keep hold of Gaul. Neither Gallienus nor Postumus seemed to have the extra resources necessary to defend the *Agri Decumates*; left high and dry, this region was severed from the empire.

In 1992, a Roman altar to the goddess of victory was discovered in Augsburg (Augusta Vindelicorum, the capital of the province of Raetia).²⁷³ It bore an inscription explaining that Roman troops, commanded by the Raetian governor Marcus Simplicinius Genialis, had defeated the “barbarians of the Semnoni or Juthungi tribe” (*barbaros gentis Semnonum sive Iouthungorum*) in the vicinity of Augsburg and freed “many thousands of Italian captives” (*multis milibus Italarum captivorum*). The inscription goes on to say that the Roman army was composed of troops stationed in Raetia, troops withdrawn from Germania (no doubt *Germania Superior*), and *populares*, which probably means militia or armed civilians. We can gather from this that Genialis had hastily assembled an army and ambushed the booty-laden Germanic warriors returning from an expedition to Italy.²⁷⁴ This event can be placed in the context of Gallienus’ victory over the Alamanni in 260 (see below). It is quite possible that Genialis defeated the very group of Germani that had eluded Gallienus.²⁷⁵ What makes the inscription even more interesting is

²⁷² This is the consensus of modern scholars, including Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 262), Drinkwater (2007, 70), and De Blois (1976, 5).

²⁷³ *AE* 1993, 1231.

²⁷⁴ This is why both Watson (1999, 220) and Drinkwater (2007, 56) date the event to 261. However, arguments could be made for other years, including 260.

²⁷⁵ Naturally, we still need to work out what relationship the Juthungi had with the Semnoni and, for that matter, with the Alamanni. The links between these ethnic groups

that it is dedicated not to Gallienus, but to Postumus (it mentions “our lord Postumus”). It thus looks like Genialis, around this time (260/1), essentially offered to place his loyalty, his army, and his province at the service of the Gallic usurper, who evidently rebuffed him and, as we have already seen, concentrated on the defence of Gaul.

In 260, the year in which Postumus seized control of Gaul, Gallienus lost not only his father, but also his son Saloninus, who was murdered or executed in Cologne in connection with Postumus’ usurpation.²⁷⁶ Gallienus then ruled alone (260–268) until the end of his life. He is an extremely interesting figure. The fact that he held on to power for a full 15 years is a remarkable feat for the third century. More than anything, however, Gallienus was a reformer who seeded great changes to the empire that were still being felt by Constantine half a century later. Nevertheless, ancient historiography almost unanimously takes a very dim view of Gallienus, with most sources quick to emphasise his life of luxury and indifference towards the empire.²⁷⁷

are problematic because Ammianus Marcellinus (XVII, 6, 1) identifies the Juthungi as part of the Alamannic tribal confederation (*Juthungi Alamannorum pars*), while the Augsburg inscription, which can be translated as “Semnoni, now known as Juthungi”, makes a connection between the Juthungi and the Suebia (e.g. Watson, 1999, 8; Bednaříková, 2003, 285–287). For a lengthy discussion on this topic and many references to modern studies, see Drinkwater (2007, 43–79) (especially 53–63).

²⁷⁶ Gallienus had two sons. The eldest, Valerian, was appointed to the position of *caesar* and co-ruler as early as 255, but died in 257 or 258. After his death, the younger Saloninus was elevated in his place. Zosimus (I, 38) and Zonaras (XII, 24) blame Postumus for Saloninus’ death, but the *HA* (*Tyr. trig.* 3, 1–3) is more doubtful. See Southern (2004, 98), Potter (2004, 257).

²⁷⁷ This unkindness towards Gallienus did not originate until the fourth century. Back in 297, he was not yet being blamed for the disasters that struck the empire in his time; see *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 10, 2–3. Aurelius Victor initially lauds Gallienus for his defence of Gaul and his triumphs over usurpers (*Aur. Vict.* 33, 1–2), but then repeatedly draws attention to his lack of interest in governing in subsequent years (*Aur. Vict.* 33, 3; 33, 6; 33, 15). Eutropius (VIII, 1) attempts an oddly “balanced” assessment of his own, noting that Gallienus ruled first happily, then comfortably, and finally to the ruin of the empire (*Gallienus cum adulescens factus est augustus, imperium primum feliciter, mox commode, ad ultimum perniciose gessit*); cf. Eutropius IX, 7, where he derides Valerian and Gallienus for their “misfortune or incompetence” (*vel infelicitate vel ignavia*) and singles out Gallienus in particular for neglecting the government after 260 (*Eutr.* IX, 11: *Gallieno rem publicam deserente*). This apathy towards affairs of state is also brought up by Orosius (*Hist.* VII, 22, 12), Jordanes (*Get.* 107, *Rom.* 287), and especially by the *Historia Augusta* (*Gall.* 3, 6–9 et al.). A similar line is taken by Jerome (*Chron.*, s. a. 261: *Gallieno in omnem lasciviam resolutus, Germani Ravennam usque venerunt*), the *Epitome* (33, 1),

That is not to say that there was no positivity at all. Some Christian writers—including those otherwise critical of Gallienus—praise him for tolerating Christians, or, more precisely, for putting a stop to Valerian’s persecution of Christians and effectively reverting to the policy pursued by most previous emperors.²⁷⁸ Timothy Barnes accurately sums up this development: “Since 260, although technically still illegal, Christianity had enjoyed effective toleration from emperors and provincial governors”.²⁷⁹ Gallienus thus secured over 40 years of unfettered prosperity for the Christian church (though we are left to wonder why exactly) (Map 3.2).²⁸⁰

Gallienus’ reign was defined most of all, however, by his military reform and the accompanying reorganisation of imperial administration. Aurelius Victor reports that Gallienus banned senators from serving in the army. Victor is our sole source for this information and his interpretation is heavily biased (we have to keep in mind that he himself was a senator).²⁸¹ Elsewhere, Victor mentions that, since the reign of the emperor Probus, “the might of the army has increased, whereas the senate has been wrested of the empire and the right to elect the emperor down to our own times”. He further argues that, had senators continued to serve in the army, there would have been no usurpations at all and the empire would have been more stable, but, as matters stood, senators wallowed in idleness and luxuriated in their riches, thus “paving the way for soldiers and, very nearly, the barbarians to prevail over them and their descendants”.²⁸² Even so, Gallienus’ actions were not primarily directed against the senate (to which, after all, Valerian and Gallienus belonged).

and Ammianus Marcellinus (XIV, 1, 9; XVIII, 6, 3; XXI, 16, 9; XXIII, 5, 3; XXX, 8, 8). Zosimus (I, 30–40) is the only one to take a neutral stand on Gallienus, describing him as a conscientious defender of the empire who did his best to avert disaster.

²⁷⁸ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 259 (*Valeriano in Persas ducto, Gallienus pacem nostris reddidit*). Cf. Oros. *Hist.* VII, 22, 5; Jord. *Rom.* 287. Eusebius (*HE* VII, 13) even quotes directly from the rescript that Gallienus addressed to Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria.

²⁷⁹ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 147.

²⁸⁰ Southern (2004, 81) cites humanitarian reasons and Gallienus’ realisation that there was nothing to be gained from persecution. Potter (2004, 314) estimates that there were six million Christians in the empire at this time, accounting for a tenth of the population. Cf. Clarke (2008, 645–646).

²⁸¹ Aur. Vict. 33, 34.

²⁸² Aur. Vict. 37, 5–7.



Map 3.2 Map of provinces in the Roman Empire and barbarian ethnic groups outside the Empire in the third century. Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission

Gallienus appears to have prevented senators from holding the highest positions in the army simply because he thought it more appropriate for these posts to be held by more experienced members of the equestrian order. In fact, senators did serve in the army as *legati legionis* (commanders of individual legions), but this was only a kind of stepping stone for them. After their praetorship or other important office came to an end, they would command a legion for a few years while waiting for a consulship, followed by a provincial governorship.²⁸³ And therein lay

²⁸³ Goldsworthy (2009, 62–63) says the average legion command and provincial governorship lasted for three years. It should be added that in those provinces that had an army, the soldiers were obviously also under the command of the relevant senator in the position of governor. The emperor Vespasian, for example, was successively praetor, legion commander (of *Legio II Augusta*), consul, and governor of Africa; he then went on to command a large army in the First Jewish Revolt. Trajan was a praetor, legion commander (of *Legio VII Gemina*), consul, and then remained a military commander.

the weakness of the whole system: most of them were not the battle-hardened commanders²⁸⁴ the empire now desperately needed. Gallien's military reform was thus not a deliberate ploy to remove senators from commanding the army just so that the equestrian order could take their place; the actual aim was to open up a pathway for the promotion of professional soldiers—most of whom indeed happened to be *equites*—for pressing reasons dictated by the emperor's desire to hastily shore up the empire's defence capabilities. Although Gallienus' relationship with the senate was no worse than that of most previous emperors, inscriptions do indicate that, once the whole empire had passed to Gallienus, senators no longer commanded legions and were replaced by *equites* holding the title of *praefectus legionis* or *praefectus agens vice legati*.²⁸⁵ The emperor may also have made this move in an attempt to sever the link between wealthy senators and the highest positions in the army in the belief that this would ultimately reduce the number of usurpations.

Gallienus' military reform logically paved the way for imperial administration to be reorganised. Since the dawn of the empire, its administrative regions had been grouped into senatorial and imperial provinces. The senatorial provinces were mostly those that lay on the shores of the Mediterranean; these were territories that had been under Roman control for centuries and were not at risk of hostilities.²⁸⁶ They were headed by a senate-appointed *proconsul*. Imperial provinces were divided into consular provinces, governed by a former consul (these were more important and larger territories, e.g. Syria), and praetorian provinces, governed

Hadrian was a praetor, legion commander (of *Legio I Minervia Pia Fidelis*), governor of Lower Pannonia, consul, and governor of Syria.

²⁸⁴ Young men from senatorial families also served as military tribunes in the legions; there were six tribunes in each legion—five of them from the equestrian order (*tribuni angusticlavii*) and one from the senatorial class (*tribunus laticlavius*). After a few years in office, these young senatorial tribunes returned to their normal civilian career: they tended to hold quaestorships, giving them access to the senate. According to Webster (1998, 112–113) and Southern (2004, 92), this position had ceased to exist by the 250 s. Campbell (2008b, 117) attributes this disappearance directly to Gallienus; in any event, a legion had six tribunes from the equestrian order during Gallienus' reign.

²⁸⁵ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 117; Lo Cascio, "The emperor and his administration", 159–160; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 93; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24–25.

²⁸⁶ There were ten of them: *Asia, Africa, Narbonensis, Baetica, Macedonia, Achaea, Creta et Cyrene, Lycia et Pamphylia, Cyprus, and Sicilia*.

by a former praetor (e.g. Noricum). Both were under the charge of a *legatus Augusti pro praetore*. At the beginning of the era we are studying (during the reign of the emperor Commodus), there were 13 consular and 13 praetorian provinces. Their numbers changed over time as a result of the expansion of the empire and the division of existing provinces. For example, after Pannonia was split into two provinces under Trajan, *Pannonia Superior* was given the status of a consular province and *Pannonia Inferior* was a praetorian province. Several other provinces were governed by a member of the equestrian order. Of these, Egypt was by far the most important and was accorded special status.

Gallienus began to install *eques* with the office of *praeses* and the title of *perfectissimus* in those imperial provinces which had traditionally been reserved for senators and where the army was stationed.²⁸⁷ Again, this was born of the need to make sure that the military units in these provinces were under capable command. Those imperial provinces in which no army was stationed do not seem to have been much affected by these changes (although an *eques*, presumably having displayed leadership qualities, would occasionally be installed there by Gallienus). Most senatorial provinces had no army and continued to be governed by senators. Although Gallienus clearly felt the need to press on in the name of progress, the senatorial class's role as a body co-responsible for the administration of the empire had been slowly declining since—and actually even before—Septimius Severus. Gallienus' reform was therefore no revolution, but the final stage of a certain evolution. Be that as it may, there is no denying that the reform seriously undermined the traditional senatorial career (*cursus honorum*) and was one of the final nails in the coffin of the senate's hold on power; for Gallienus, this came at the cost of ill repute in our sources.²⁸⁸

It was not only the equestrian order on whom Gallienus relied: if there were ever a time that every soldier carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack, it was under Gallienus, who desperately needed not only soldiers, but also capable commanders to preserve what was left of his

²⁸⁷ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 258. Lo Cascio (2008, 160) traces the beginning of this change (based on surviving inscriptions) to 262.

²⁸⁸ Southern (2004, 91) concludes that the reform swept away a hindrance for Gallienus, namely “a transient corps of upper-class officers with little experience of war, fortuitously placed in positions of authority where their potential for making the wrong decisions was dangerous and their reliability questionable”.

empire after Postumus' usurpation and the disasters in the East.²⁸⁹ This was why he promoted common soldiers to positions of command solely and exclusively on the basis of their ability, regardless of their background. Gallienus' general Aureolus was said to have been a humble shepherd before joining the army,²⁹⁰ yet rapidly rose through the ranks to command the entire Roman equestrian order.²⁹¹ Likewise, during the reign of Claudius Gothicus the same position was held by the future emperor Aurelian, the son of a lowly peasant.²⁹² For that matter, Diocletian himself was of very low birth (and in all likelihood began serving in the army in the last years of Gallienus' reign), yet worked his way up to commander of the imperial bodyguard and one of Europe's most influential rulers.

The mention of Aureolus as commander of the equestrian order would make no sense in the context of the Roman army of the 1st or second century CE, since no such position existed at that time; within the structure of a Roman legion, the cavalry formed only a small component and was only tasked with support duties. By the mid-third century, however, there had been a significant rethink of the Roman army's tactics, composition, and deployment. Until then, the army had relied on its foot soldiers; now the emphasis had begun to shift towards the men on horseback. Around 260, Gallienus created an independent corps of horsemen, probably by withdrawing existing cavalry units (*alae, cohortes equitatae*) from the legions and adding newly formed ones.²⁹³ The corps was stationed near Milan (Gallienus' capital at the beginning of his independent reign) to defend against the Alamanni or Postumus. If the emperor went to war, the cavalry would fall under his direct control; however, Gallienus often seems to have delegated command to his cavalry commander, one Aureolus.²⁹⁴ The corps had no name: sources simply call its members *equites* (horsemen), whose loyalty was celebrated by the Milanese mint

²⁸⁹ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 88.

²⁹⁰ Zon. XII, 24.

²⁹¹ According to Zonaras XII, 25. Zosimus (I, 40, 1) describes Aureolus simply as the leader of the *equites*.

²⁹² *HA, Aurel.* 18, 1 (*equites sane omnes ante imperium sub Claudio Aurelianus gubernavit*).

²⁹³ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 88.

²⁹⁴ Campbell, "The Severan Dynasty", 115.

(*fides equitum*).²⁹⁵ This corps was also used by Claudius Gothicus and Aurelian,²⁹⁶ but we find no further mention of it during the reign of Diocletian, which suggests that it was probably not a direct predecessor of the mobile army of the tetrarchs and Constantine.

Another of Gallienus' reforms was the establishment of a body of *protectores* (during Aurelian's reign, one of them would be Constantine's father Constantius). We know that in the *fourth* century this corps served as a military school for those aspiring to officer rank. At that time, these cadets were distinguished in rank as the lower *protectores* or higher *protectores domestici* and were selected from "respectable officer families and often assigned to the adjutant service" of generals (*magistri militum*).²⁹⁷ Such was the career of the historian Ammianus Marcellinus and the future emperor Jovian.²⁹⁸ We are faced with the question of the corps' role, structure, and size in Gallienus' time. As the sources are silent on the matter, we can only speculate. However, it does seem likely that the corps consisted of select men who served the emperor at close quarters during military campaigns and performed special duties,²⁹⁹ but it was not intended to replace the praetorians (who still existed and were abolished only by Constantine).

In 260, Aureolus crushed the usurper Ingenuus at Mursa, and Gallienus himself defeated the usurper Regalianus in Illyricum. In the meantime, the Alamanni had entered northern Italy, but Gallienus was able to quell them at Milan in the summer of the same year, putting an

²⁹⁵ Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army*, 200–201; Webb, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume V, Part I*, 169.

²⁹⁶ In these particular instances, Zosimus (I, 43, 2; 52, 3) refers to the corps as the "Dalmatian cavalry", as does HA (*Claud.* 11, 9: *equites Dalmatae*).

²⁹⁷ Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 76. Jones (1964, 638) says that "the directly commissioned protectores were often the sons of fathers high up in the service".

²⁹⁸ Jovian was a *protector domesticus* in 361, when he was 30; his father Varronianus was a distinguished commander in the reign of Constantius II. The importance of this corps eventually faded, and by the sixth century it played a purely ceremonial role at the imperial court.

²⁹⁹ This is how Jones (1964, 636) sees it, but Campbell (2008b, 119) believes that only a privileged group of the emperor's favourites was assigned to the corps of *protectores* at this early stage, while Potter (2004, 451) views it as "a special guard unit attached to the emperor" and Southern (2004, 90) considers the establishment of the *protectores* to be part of Gallienus' efforts to exclude senators from command of the army; it was to be a new social class and a pool of future army commanders ("it is possible that Gallienus was keen to establish a new kind of aristocracy of military men with proven ability").

end to this Germanic tribal confederation's machinations until the end of Gallienus' reign. In the spring of 261, Aureolus slew Fulvius Macrianus (Macrianus Major) and his son Macrianus Minor in Illyricum as they were marching on Italy to eliminate Gallienus. Macrianus Major's other son Quietus and his prefect Ballista were vanquished by Odaenathus, on Gallienus' behalf, at Emesa.³⁰⁰ And when, in 262, Gallienus' general Theodotus succeeded in quashing Aemilian's revolt in Egypt, there was no usurper left on imperial territory, apart, that is, from Postumus. Truth be told, the *Agri Decumates* were swarming with barbarians, as were parts of Dacia,³⁰¹ and vast swathes in the East were not under Gallienus' direct control. Even so, Odaenathus was not a usurper and the East still formally belonged to the empire.

Septimius Odaenathus was from a noble Palmyrene family.³⁰² After the capture of the emperor Valerian, he bided his time, doing nothing more than defend his own territories for about a year as he awaited the outcome of the civil warring.³⁰³ Once it became clear in mid-261 that Gallienus would hold on to power, Odaenathus dispatched Quietus and Ballista with ease in Emesa. His reward appears to have been Gallienus' recognition of him as the *de facto* ruler of the East. That is not to say that Gallienus accepted him as co-ruler; quite the opposite, Odaenathus acknowledged Gallienus' superiority.³⁰⁴ As with Postumus' empire, we

³⁰⁰ See Zon. XII, 24; *HA, Gall.* 3, 4; *Tyr. trig.* 15, 4.

³⁰¹ Festus (8) says frankly that Dacia was lost under Gallienus (*sub Gallieno imperatore amissa est*) and is backed up on this by Eutropius (IX, 8). The big winners here were the Goths. Yet it was not until the time of Aurelian that troops were withdrawn from Dacia, as we shall see later.

³⁰² His name is Arabic (Udaynath, in modern Arabic Uday; see Ball, 2000, 77). Odaenathus' family name of Septimius had been adopted by his ancestors. One of them, probably his grandfather, was granted Roman citizenship by the emperor Septimius Severus because of his local importance; new citizens traditionally took the family name of the emperor who had granted them citizenship (Southern, 2008, 6).

³⁰³ At one point (we know not when, but in all probability immediately after Valerian's defeat), Odaenathus approached Shapur, keen to assure him of his support, and sent him a letter and gifts. This provoked Shapur's anger, as he had expected the king of Palmyra to come in person and fall down before him. It is possible that, from this point onwards, Odaenathus decided that his loyalties lay with Rome (Peter the Patrician, frg. 10, *FHG* 4, p. 187; for other interpretations, see Southern, 2008, 60–61).

³⁰⁴ For example, the mint at Antioch had been striking coins for Gallienus, not Odaenathus, since 262 (Southern, 2004, 104).

are hard put to name Odaenathus' territory, but David Potter's "pro-
 tectorate of Odaenathus" would be very fitting.³⁰⁵ Just how large a
 territory was controlled by Odaenathus is disputed: besides Syria, he
 perhaps also ruled Arabia, Palestine, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, and Cyprus,³⁰⁶
 although the governors of these provinces were chosen by Gallienus.³⁰⁷
 The sources do not tell us exactly what official Roman title was accorded
 to this unusual position, but it was probably *corrector totius Orientis*
 (governor of the whole of the East).³⁰⁸ Whatever his official status,
 Odaenathus not only defended Roman territory robustly against Shapur's
 campaigns, but actually mounted his own offensives against Persia; twice
 (in 262–263 and 267), he even managed to reach as far as the Persian
 capital of Ctesiphon.³⁰⁹

A fragile—and temporary—balance was thus struck in the empire in
 261. Odaenathus was willing to cooperate fully with Gallienus' govern-
 ment, and Gallienus was unable to get rid of Postumus, who had
 never attempted to remove Gallienus. When Gallienus marked 10 years
 of reign (his *decennalia*) in Rome in 262, there was plenty to cele-
 brate. Not only was he the first emperor since the death of Severus
 Alexander to survive 10 years of rule (only Diocletian would manage
 a similar feat), but internal wranglings in the empire had simmered
 down. At this time, Gallienus could even afford the luxury of residing
 in Rome and devoting some of his time to the study of philosophy;
 he is known to have listened to lectures by Plotinus, the founder of

³⁰⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 261.

³⁰⁶ Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, 69–70.

³⁰⁷ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 260.

³⁰⁸ This title is reconstructed from Aramaic inscriptions and is generally accepted as authentic (see Drinkwater, 2008, 45; Potter, 2004, 260; Wilkes, 2008, 221–222; Watson, 1999, 32). The *Historia Augusta's* repeated claims that Odaenathus usurped the title of emperor (*HA, Tyr. trig.* 16, 1; 17, 1; *Gall.* 1, 1; 3, 3; 10, 1) are entirely implausible. Zonaras (XII, 24) refers to him as the military leader of all the East; Southern (2008, 63–67) contentiously sees in this title the Latin equivalent of *dux Romanorum*. So much for his Roman titles; in his relations with the local population, Odaenathus opted for the modest title of "king of kings", which was manifestly intended as an insult to Shapur since only Sasanian rulers naturally had a claim to this title.

³⁰⁹ Festus 23 (*fusus aliquotiens Persis, non modo nostrum limitem defendisset, sed etiam ad Ctesifontem Romani ultor imperii, quod mirum est dictu, penetrasset*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 266; *HA, Tyr. trig.* 15, 4. Only Zosimus (I, 39, 2) asserts that there were two expeditions (the dating is by Southern, 2004, 101).

Neoplatonism, who was also currently in Rome. As a Hellenophile, the emperor undoubtedly conversed with Plotinus in Greek. From what the philosopher's pupil Porphyry tells us in chapter twelve of his biography on his teacher, Gallienus and his wife Salonina held Plotinus in high esteem. The philosopher wanted to play on this friendship to build, with their blessing, Platonopolis—evidently some sort of microstate where the inhabitants would live according to Plato's laws—in Campania. According to Porphyry, this scheme would have succeeded “had some of Gallienus' court not thwarted it with their envy or ill-will or on other spurious grounds”. The more likely reason is that, after the formation of Postumus' empire and the protectorate of Odaenathus, Gallienus was none too keen on the idea of voluntarily losing another part of his territory (or was simply too sensible to take such a dubious experiment seriously).

The emperor seems to have used this period of relative tranquility (262–265) both to introduce the reforms described above and to promote the arts and learning (which is what the *Historia Augusta* interprets as indolence and disregard for the empire). In 264, he also visited Athens, where he was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and named an eponymous archon.³¹⁰ In 265, he mounted a failed expedition against Postumus and ended up wounded.³¹¹ The Danubian “Scythians” kept to themselves during these years, save for one raid that probably took place in 262. A band of Goths led by a mysteriously named trio of Respa, Veduco, and Thuruar crossed the Danube, sailed across the strait of the Hellespont, and ravaged many cities in western Asia Minor, including Ephesus, Nicomedia, and Chalcedon.³¹² There was evidently another raid in 266 that saw the Goths take ship across the Black Sea and reach directly into Asia Minor; Odaenathus managed to stop them in their tracks, but

³¹⁰ The eponymous archon, the highest Athenian official, was appointed for one year (he was “eponymous” because Athens used his name to date the year in which he held office). As the Athenian year began in July, we can assume that Gallienus was archon in 264–265. See Drinkwater (2008, 46), Kienast (1996, 219).

³¹¹ Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 262) date this expedition to 266–267.

³¹² The primary source here is Jordanes (*Get.* 107–108). The *Historia Augusta* (*Gallieni duo* 21, 5) mentions only that Gallienus defeated the Goths after his *decennalia* (*post decennalia Gothos ab eo victos*). See Drinkwater (2008, 46), Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 276).

he was unable to finish them off and they returned home with their plunder.³¹³

The Danubian Goths, encouraged by the success of their neighbours, joined forces with them to launch a large-scale campaign against the empire, evidently in 267.³¹⁴ The chronology and course of this war are far from certain, but it seems that the Goths and Heruli (from the area of present-day Ukraine) took to their ships and laid waste to Greece and Macedonia, while the Danubian Goths (from the area of present-day Romania) invaded Thrace. The Roman fleet fought off some of these invaders. Gallienus arrived in Greece in 268 and, probably in the spring of that year, crushed a fair few of these barbarians on the river Nestos in northern Macedonia.³¹⁵ However, he then left the Balkan war in the hands of his general Marcianus because he had to return to Italy in all haste after learning that his able military leader Aureolus, whom he had commissioned in Milan to protect Italy from Postumus and the barbarians of the Upper Danube, had rebelled against him and switched his loyalty to Postumus (and even started minting coins bearing Postumus' likeness). In the summer of 268, Gallienus defeated Aureolus at Milan and laid siege to him in that city. Such is the approximate consensus among modern scholars. Much is uncertain about the war against the Danubian and Black Sea barbarians, including what part Gallienus played in its victorious conclusion. Most sources deny him any success at all.

Zosimus relates that when the "Scythians" invaded, the rattled Gallienus marched against them in the Balkans and, while at war here, he learned of Aureolus' usurpation and returned to Italy. Unfortunately, Zosimus gives no indication that Gallienus achieved any success in this

³¹³ According to Drinkwater (2008, 46). Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 283) believe the year was 267. Odaenathus was assassinated shortly thereafter, either in 267 (Southern, 2004, 102) or in the spring of 268 (Potter, 2004, 263). Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 283) conclude that it was late 267 and consider Gallienus highly likely to have instigated the murder. If so, it gained Gallienus nothing because rule of the East was taken over by Odaenathus' widow, Zenobia (see below).

³¹⁴ Drinkwater (2008, 46), Southern (2004, 105), and Goltz and Hartmann (2008, 284) place the beginning of this incursion in 267; Kienast (1996, 218) and Potter (2004, 263) say it was in 268.

³¹⁵ The Nestos formed the boundary between Macedonia and Thrace (the river is now known as the Mesta in Bulgaria and still as the Nestos in Greece). It is not clear where on its 230 km length the battle took place.

war.³¹⁶ Aurelius Victor even gives the impression that Gallienus did not lift a finger in response to this incursion. He writes that the barbarians passed unhindered through the Balkans and, once they had plundered Macedonia, Greece, and Asia Minor, were in no hurry to get back home; on the contrary, they all but took up residence in the empire.³¹⁷ It took the arrival of the emperor Claudius Gothicus to remedy the situation. Victor's aim in reporting this, subsequently mirrored by Eutropius and other authors, was to accentuate Claudius' success all the more.³¹⁸ On the other hand, the *Historia Augusta*, whose bias against Gallienus we have already had occasion to examine, acknowledges, in its own peculiar way, this emperor's success: "Gallienus, meanwhile, being somewhat alarmed at the misfortunes of the empire, marched against the Goths who were wandering around Illyricum, and only by chance [*fortuito*] slew very many of them".³¹⁹

Zonaras, when describing the beginning of Gallienus' reign (XII, 24), only fleetingly mentions that he was triumphant over the Heruli, "a Scythian-Gothic tribe"; here, Zonaras may well have been referring to his later success in 268. When he goes on to describe the Herulian invasion during the reign of Claudius (XII, 26), this actually seems to be an event from the time of Gallienus, because he writes about their voyage across the Black Sea to Greece and Asia Minor, the unsuccessful siege of Thessalonica, and of the sack of Athens. He even mentions a certain Athenian citizen, Cleodamus, who managed to escape from Athens in time and

³¹⁶ Zos. I, 38–40.

³¹⁷ Aur. Vict. 33, 3 (*Thraciam Gothi libere pergressi Macedonas Achaeosque et Asiae finitima occuparent*); Aur. Vict. 34, 3 (*Gothos [...], quos diuturnitas nimis validos ac prope incolas effecerat*).

³¹⁸ Eutr. IX, 8 (*Dacia, quae a Traiano ultra Danubium fuerat adiecta, tum amissa, Graecia, Macedonia, Pontus, Asia vastata est per Gothos*); Oros. Hist. VII, 22 (*Graecia, Macedonia, Pontus, Asia Gothorum inundatione delentur. Nam Dacia trans Danubium in perpetuum aufertur*); Cassiod. chron. 27 (*Graecia, Macedonia, Pontus, Asia depopolatae per Gothos*). In his summary of the "Scythian" invasions, Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXI, 5, 17) also mentions the barbarians' unobstructed depredations in the Balkans; though he does not name Gallienus directly, it is clear from the context that he means his reign (*vagati per Epirum Thesaliamque et omnem Graeciam licentius hostes externi*).

³¹⁹ *HA, Gall.* 13, 9. Although Illyricum is a long way from the Nestos, the *HA* probably has this victory in mind because, in the preceding sentence, it says how barbarians were present in Epirus, Macedonia, and Moesia; if the *HA*'s author lived at the end of the *fourth* century, this would make sense, since the praetorian prefecture of *Illyricum* included all these areas at that time.

then teamed up with other Athenians to launch a successful attack on the barbarians from the sea in boats or ships, thus inducing them to retreat. This Cleodamus is also mentioned in the *Historia Augusta* as Gallienus' engineer from Byzantium who was charged with overseeing cities' fortifications.³²⁰ Here, Zonaras is evidently drawing on the same source as the *Historia Augusta*, i.e. the historian Dexippus, whom we have already mentioned.³²¹

Publius Herennius Dexippus came from a respected and wealthy Athenian family. He held important offices in Athens and directed the defence of Athens in 267 (assuming that was the year of the Herulian invasion), before devoting himself to writing and compiling several historical works, of which only fragments have survived. One of them, dwelling on the invasion of Greece by the Heruli, is actually a speech in which Dexippus exhorts his fellow-citizens to fight the enemy after Athens has fallen into the hands of the enemy and been sacked. According to that fragment, Dexippus mustered 2,000 men somewhere in Attica with the intention of deploying them against the Heruli in guerilla warfare rather than open conflict. In the speech, Dexippus also hinted that an imperial fleet was approaching. There are evident overlaps with Zonaras and the *Historia Augusta* here (if we replace the name Cleodamus with Dexippus).³²²

Even more details are supplied by Syncellus,³²³ who describes how the Heruli sailed across the Black Sea in 500 ships, conquered Byzantium and Chrysopolis, reached the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea, ravaged the islands of Lemnos and Skyros, landed in Attica, and sacked Athens, Corinth, Argos, Sparta, and all of Greece.³²⁴ The local population, to whom Gallienus sent reinforcements, fought back valiantly. Then the emperor himself slaughtered 3,000 of these Heruli in the Battle “of Naissus”, which is apparently a reference, as we have already seen, to the

³²⁰ *HA, Gall.* 13, 6 (Cleodamus).

³²¹ Millar, *P. Herennius Dexippus*, 27. The author of the *HA* openly acknowledges Dexippus as his source (*HA, Gall.* 13, 8). Dexippus is usually also considered the source of the first book in Zosimus' *New History* (e.g. Bleckmann, 1992, 20).

³²² Dexippus, frg. 21.

³²³ Syncellus, 717.

³²⁴ Despite the tragic tone of this account, the scale of the devastation of Athens was not that great (see Brown, 2011, 85), and Corinth shows no signs of any depredation at this time (Slane, 1994, 163: “our present evidence indicates that Corinth was untouched by the Heruli”).

Battle of the Nestos fought in the spring of 268. After the battle, Naulobatus, the Herulian chieftain, surrendered to the emperor and, in return, was granted the status of consul.³²⁵ Gallienus then hastened to Italy to confront Aureolus, leaving his general Marcianus in charge of purging the Balkans of barbarians.³²⁶

By the time another large-scale invasion of the Balkans was mounted in 269, again involving mostly Heruli and Goths,³²⁷ Gallienus was dead, assassinated by his officers at Milan during the siege of Aureolus in the summer or autumn of 268.³²⁸ Claudius was elected as the second of the Illyrian emperors. The details of his life before 268 come only from the *HA* and are probably fictitious³²⁹; his role in the removal of Gallienus is also obscured by our sources, and even his status at this time is not known with certainty.³³⁰ Aureolus, who had also declared himself emperor in the

³²⁵ Southern (2004, 106) is of the opinion that Gallienus defeated Naulobatus in Illyricum, before prevailing over another group of barbarians at the Nestos. Watson (1999, 40) considers the clash at the Nestos to be more or less indecisive and imagines that it was followed by a truce requiring this faction of the Heruli to leave the empire. Syncellus, on the other hand, says nothing of the sort, instead claiming that Naulobatus surrendered and placed himself at the emperor's mercy.

³²⁶ *HA*, *Gall.* 6, 1.

³²⁷ Alföldi (1967, 436–439) combined the two invasions into one, but this hypothesis is rejected by Bleckmann (1992, 191–201) and Hartmann (2008, 301). Admittedly, the descriptions of the two invasions in our sources are peppered with similarities, especially in the case of Zosimus (I, 38–40; 42–46). Watson (1999, 216) represents the undecided: “The evidence is simply too confused to say with any certainty whether there were two (or more) invasions, or only one”.

³²⁸ Gallienus was assassinated in the summer of 268 (Potter, 2004, 264), in July or August (Southern, 2004, 106–107), in late August or early September (Hartmann, 2008, 299; Peachin, 1990, 40), in early September (Drinkwater, 2008, 48; Watson, 1999, 41), or around September (Kienast, 1996, 218).

³²⁹ If the *HA* is to be trusted, Claudius was born in the Balkans, specifically in “Dardania” (*Claud.* 13, 2), which was part of the province of Upper Moesia (*Moesia Superior*).

³³⁰ We have no idea why Gallienus was assassinated (for speculation, see Goltz & Hartmann, 2008, 291), but he appears to have fallen victim to a plot by several disgruntled officers, whose names vary from one source to another: the *Historia Augusta* (*Gallieni duo* 14, 1) says the plotters were the praetorian prefect Heraclianus and the general Marcianus (this can hardly be true if Marcianus was commanding operations against the barbarians in the Balkans at that time); according to Aurelius Victor (33, 21), the future emperor Aurelian was also involved. The *Historia Augusta* (*Gall.* 14, 1–2) is at pains to point out that Claudius himself knew nothing of it, but Zosimus counters this, saying that Claudius was one of the conspirators (*Zos.* I, 40). Most sources, however, try to give

meantime, surrendered to Claudius and was promptly killed.³³¹ At the time Claudius was proclaimed emperor, the Alamanni had crossed the Upper Danube, invaded Raetia, and were headed for Italy. Claudius rode out to intercept them and defeated them in the nick of time in the autumn of 268 at Lake Garda, about 120 km east of Milan.³³² He then wintered in Rome and, defying the senate, had Gallienus deified.³³³

The Gothic invasion of 269 is mainly described by Zosimus and the *Historia Augusta*. Zosimus speaks of the Scythians, the Heruli, the Peukai (he means the Peucini or Bastarnae), and the Goths, who, numbering a sum total of 320,000 warriors, boarded 6,000 ships and headed southwest along the coast from the mouth of the river Tyras (the present-day Dniester). The *Historia Augusta* cites the same number of barbarians, but only 2,000 ships; the list of “Scythian” tribes here is longer.³³⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus is less specific, describing a host of “Scythians” (*Scythicarum*

the impression that Claudius played no part (because of his supposed kinship with the Constantinian dynasty; see Appendix A). Aurelius Victor (33, 28) goes so far as to claim that Gallienus, breathing his last, designated Claudius (who at that time was in Ticinum, present-day Pavia, about 30 km south of Milan) as his successor and had the imperial regalia dispatched to him; the same is said by the *Epitome* (34, 2). Aurelius Victor (33, 28) also observes that Claudius was a tribune at the time of Gallienus’ death, but Bird (1994, 144) considers this too low a position for a man who was to become emperor. Zonaras (XII, 26) makes Claudius the commander of the cavalry, but does not give any details.

³³¹ Our sources cannot agree whether he was killed by his own men (*Epitome* 34, 2; *HA, Claud.* 5, 3), by Claudius’ soldiers (*Zos.* I, 41), by the future emperor Aurelian (*HA, Aurel.* 16, 2), or by the future emperor Claudius (*HA, Tyr. trig.* 11, 4).

³³² This is according to Kienast (1996, 231) and Hartmann (2008, 301), though Drinkwater (2007, 71) and Watson (1999, 43) believe it was the beginning of 269. The source here is the *Epitome* (34, 2).

³³³ On the one hand, the people and the senate in Rome gave vent to their anger immediately after the news of Gallienus’ death and killed some of his relatives (see Zonaras XII, 26); on the other hand, the soldiers were enraged by Gallienus’ death. Claudius had to proceed with great caution and, in addition to distributing monetary gifts, appeased the soldiers by quickly removing Aureolus and deifying Gallienus.

³³⁴ *Zos.* I, 42–46. *HA, Claud.* 6, 5 (*armatorum trecenta viginti milia*); *Claud.* 8, 1 (*habuerunt praeterea duo milia navium*); *Claud.* 8, 2 (*Scytharum diversi populi, Peuci, Grutungii, Austrugoti, Tervingii, Visi, Gepedes, Celtae etiam et Eruli*). Some of these peoples (the Gepids and Heruli) are entirely plausible, others (the Scythians and Celts) are anachronistic, and there are two intriguing doublets—the Greuthungi are Ostrogoths and the Thervingi are Visigoths; the author of the *HA* has probably listed here all the names of the barbarian tribes on the Lower Danube that he (or Dexippus) had heard of.

gentium catervae) with 2,000 ships.³³⁵ The barbarians sailed the Sea of Marmara and then split up. Some of them invaded Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece. After their siege of Thessalonica failed,³³⁶ they proceeded to plunder the interior of Macedonia (around Doberus and Pelagonia). They were stopped by Claudius' Dalmatian cavalry, lost 3,000 men in battle, and were subsequently crushed by Claudius' main army at the Battle of Naissus before the end of 269.³³⁷ Following the Battle of Naissus, mirroring the aftermath of the Battle of the Nestos, a Herulian warrior—this time a certain Andonnoballus—defected to the Roman side with his entourage, presumably a retinue, as he asked the emperor for good wine so that he could drink and rejoice with all his people.³³⁸

Meanwhile, a second contingent sailed around Greece in ships, preying on coastal settlements wherever they could; however, no towns were captured (thanks to previous efforts by Gallienus' men to fortify them). Thwarted here, these barbarians tried to plunder elsewhere, ravaging Rhodes, parts of Asia Minor, Crete, and Cyprus. During 270, however, they suffered defeat in a whole slew of naval battles and the Mediterranean was cleansed of them. Those barbarians who had not been slain by Claudius or his military leaders in the Balkans in the previous year were now mown down in attacks by the Roman cavalry or, failing that, fell victim to famine or to the plague that broke out again that year.

³³⁵ Amm. Marc. XXXI, 5, 15.

³³⁶ The siege of Thessalonica is a typical complication in the debate about whether the empire suffered just the one invasion in 267–269, or whether there were several. The siege is mentioned by Zonaras (although, as we have seen, we cannot be sure if he is referring to the reign of Gallienus or Claudius) and by the author of the *HA*, in relation to the time of both Gallienus (*Gall.* 5, 6: *occupatis Thraciis Macedoniam vastaverunt, Thessalonicam obsederunt*) and Claudius (*Claud.* 9, 8: *pugnatum apud Thessalonicenses, quos Claudio absente obsederant barbari*). Zosimus (I, 43) mentions a single siege and places it in the reign of Claudius. The event is also mentioned by Ammianus (XXXI, 5, 16: *diu multitudo Thessalonicam circumsegit*), but here it is unclear to which period it is supposed to belong. Drinkwater (2008, 46 and 49) suggests that Thessalonica was besieged in the first invasion and that, during the second invasion, the barbarians “may even have resumed the siege of Thessalonica”). Southern (2004, 105 and 109) is even bolder, surmising that the siege of Thessalonica lasted throughout both invasions, i.e. 267–269!

³³⁷ Zos. I, 43. Naissus is present-day Niš in Serbia, then and now an important city (and the birthplace of Constantine the Great). Kulikowski (2007, 20) dates Claudius' victory at Naissus to 270.

³³⁸ *Anonymus post Dionem* 9, 3–4.

This epidemic—one of the waves of that scourge which, as we have already seen, first erupted about 250—also claimed many lives among the Romans, including the emperor himself, who died of the plague in Sirmium in late August or September 270.³³⁹

Claudius II, aka Claudius Gothicus, reigned too briefly to leave much of a trace in our sources. We do not even know whether he approved of his predecessor's reforms, although, as he had made a career out of serving in the military and was thus part of the new system devised by Gallienus for the command of the Roman army, we can assume he saw some value in this restructuring. In any event, he did not reverse or alter any of his predecessor's rearrangements, suggesting that Gallienus' rule was not as bad as later sources describe it. Claudius, consumed by the Gothic threat, had no time to have a go at recovering lost territories in the West or East, but he was fortunate that the two separatist states were in crisis during his reign. In the "Gallic Empire", there was a revolving door of leaders in 269; Victorinus (269–271), the last of them, had to part company with Hispania after it declared its loyalty to the central government. Consequently, on that side at least, Claudius had nothing to fear.³⁴⁰ The same can be said of Odaenathus' empire. Odaenathus himself had been assassinated in 267 or 268,³⁴¹ and formally his (approximately 10-year-old) son Vaballathus ruled the East after him; in reality, however, the reins of government were firmly in the grip of Odaenathus'

³³⁹ Hartmann (2008, 299) believes this was in late August; Southern (2008, 105) says August or September. According to realists, Claudius died of the plague (Zos. I, 46; Eutr. IX, 11; *HA, Claud.* 12, 2). Fantasists, on the other hand, claim he sacrificed himself so that the Goths could be defeated (Aur. Vict. 34, 3–5; *Epitome* 34, 3–5). In this act of *devotio*, a general hurls himself against his enemies in battle instead of his soldiers. According to Victor, as a result of his action the army suffered no casualties and the Goths were defeated and driven off. This is patently nonsense, and the victory at Naissus came at a cost. Even so, Victor has made Claudius a hero on a par with the finest examples that the ancient Roman past has to offer, and in doing so presents us with a perfectly purified biography (which he did for propaganda reasons; see Appendix A). It is worth noting that when Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXI, 5, 17) briefly mentioned the reign of Claudius II, he remarked that this emperor died an "honourable death" (*honesta morte*), which does not seem to be consistent with death by plague.

³⁴⁰ In addition, Potter (2004, 266) notes that Claudius' prefect Placidianus managed to regain the southern part of Gaul.

³⁴¹ Watson (1999, 59) and Southern (2008, 77) date Odaenathus' death to between August 267 and August 268. Potter (2004, 261) puts the year at 268 and Stoneman (1995, 155) judges it to be 267. Cf. *PLRE I*, 638–639, Odaenathus ("murdered at Emesa a. 266/7").

wife Zenobia,³⁴² who was unwilling to engage in any confrontation with the central government for the time being (she minted coins in Antioch for Claudius, just as she had earlier minted them for Gallienus). Even so, she claimed for her son the same titles that Gallienus had bestowed on Odaenathus—most notably *corrector totius Orientis*—as if they were hereditary and beyond the remit of any decision-making by the emperor. Then there is the fact that as early as 270, when Claudius (and after him Aurelian) was occupied elsewhere, she seized Roman Arabia, and after that Egypt; in the spring of 271 she took possession of northern Syria, and during the rest of that year she also secured the greater part of Asia Minor—according to Zosimus, she reached as far as the city of Ancyra (present-day Ankara, Turkey) in Galatia.³⁴³ The conquest of these two separatist empires was only a matter of the one thing that Claudius did not have: time.

Our sources give the impression that Claudius was not involved in a conspiracy against Gallienus, that he took over the government at the insistence of absolutely everyone, enjoyed a warm relationship with the senate, won all his battles, and encountered no opposition throughout his reign.³⁴⁴ When we add to this list of virtues the brevity of his rule (too short for us to expose the emperor's weaknesses or lay bare his policies) and the fact that he was not removed by force, we come very close to

³⁴² All Greek sources (Zosimus, Malalas, Syncellus, and Zonaras) use the name of the queen in this (Hellenic) form.

³⁴³ Zos. I, 50, 1 (Zenobia is said to have encountered stiff resistance from the local population in Bithynia). The dating is by Southern (2008, 105 and 114–117) and Watson (1999, 61–64). Stoneman (1995, 155) concludes that Zenobia may have conquered Egypt as early as 269 and 270.

³⁴⁴ In contrast to Gallienus' reign, the *Historia Augusta* lists only one usurper, a certain Censorinus, during Claudius' time (*Tyr. trig.* 33). This is an entirely fabricated figure. We are told that Censorinus was twice consul (but he is not mentioned in the lists of consuls), twice praetorian prefect (under which emperors?), and held many other offices besides, and yet he left no trace. The author of the *HA* may have had to come up with a biography a century later, but this was still a boldfaced lie because a prominent member of the senate with such a distinguished career cannot vanish into thin air. The name is a clever invention—it is quite common even in late antiquity and alludes to the republican era (the Censorines, a branch of the Marcian family, go back to royal times). Also, having this usurper assassinated by his own soldiers shortly after his election was a good idea on the part of the *HA*'s author, because the shorter the reign, the less likely it is to leave any traces.

the profile of an ideal ruler. No wonder, then, that of all the rulers of the third century, Constantine chose this emperor as his ancestor.³⁴⁵

Upon Claudius' death, the senate declared as the new emperor his younger brother Quintillus, whom Claudius had left behind in Rome. The Danubian legions disagreed, feeling that the experienced army commander Aurelian would be a more suitable candidate. Quintillus marched his troops out of Rome to confront Aurelian, who just as determinedly marched out of Sirmium, and with a larger army to boot. In the end, there was no need to do battle: when Quintillus reached Aquileia, his soldiers assassinated him (or he committed suicide). Quintillus thus ruled only until September (or more likely October) 270.³⁴⁶

Lucius Domitius Aurelianus ruled from 270 to 275. We do not know when³⁴⁷ or where he was born. The *Historia Augusta* lists three places Aurelian may have come from—Sirmium, *Dacia Ripensis*, or “Moesia” (without specifying whether this was *Moesia Superior* or *Inferior*)³⁴⁸; elsewhere, it says he was from Pannonia and spoke only Latin.³⁴⁹ According to the *Epitome* (35, 1), he came from the region “between Dacia and Macedonia” (*inter Daciam et Macedoniam*). Eutropius, on the other hand, writes that he came from the area that would later become the province of *Dacia Ripensis*.³⁵⁰ He was said to be of humble birth—his father was even said to have been a mere *colonus* working the land of a certain senator Aurelius.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ See Appendix A for more details.

³⁴⁶ Zosimus (I, 47) says he reigned for several months, *HA, Aurel.* (37, 6) 20 days, *HA, Claud.* (12, 5) and Eutropius (IX, 12) just 17 days, and the *Epitome* (34, 5) merely a few days (*paucis diebus imperium tenens*). He did manage to have quite a lot of coins struck, not only in Rome but also in Milan, Siscia and Cyzicus (Webb, 1972a, 239–247); moreover, the mint in Rome “shows a slight tendency to improve during his reign” (Webb, 1972a, 205). All this points to a reign lasting for several months rather than a few days. As to how he died, Zosimus and *HA, Aurel.* (37, 6) speak of suicide, while *HA, Claud.* (12, 5) claims assassination by his soldiers. The place of death is given by Jerome (*Chron. s. a.* 271).

³⁴⁷ Bird (1994, 148) estimates 215; Watson (1999, 1) suggests 214 or 215.

³⁴⁸ *HA, Aurel.* 3, 1–2.

³⁴⁹ *HA, Aurel.* 24, 3 (*homo Pannonius*).

³⁵⁰ Eutr. IX, 13, 1.

³⁵¹ *Epitome* 35, 1 (*genitus patre mediocri et, ut quidam ferunt, Aurelii clarissimi senatoris colono*); cf. *HA, Aurel.* 3, 1 (*familia obscuriore*).

In the new type of army created by Gallienus, one's birth was irrelevant. If we assume that Aurelian was born around 215, he could have joined the army around 235. By the time of Gallienus, Aurelian must have already been an officer, and by 267 at the latest he was one of Gallienus' top brass. He accompanied the emperor to the Battle of the Nestos and was with him when he took on Aureolus, who, as we have seen, attempted to usurp supreme power in 268. Although it is unclear what part Aurelianus played in Gallienus' removal, he undoubtedly benefited from it because he took over the position of commander-in-chief of the cavalry when his peer and ally Claudius became emperor. It was in this role that he made a telling contribution to the Roman victory at the Battle of Naissus.

We cannot be sure precisely when Aurelian was proclaimed emperor, but by all accounts it must have been in the autumn of 270.³⁵² Taking control of the central part of the empire was easy, but the borders were a different kettle of fish altogether. To deal with the immediate and serious problems here, he lost no time in visiting Rome; in Ravenna, he received senate representatives, who assured him that he could count on the senate's loyalty, whereupon he at once set off with his army for Pannonia to confront the Vandals, who were mounting an invasion near Aquincum (not far from Budapest). In his rush, Aurelian did not have time to take up his consulship (271) in Rome, as would have been customary.³⁵³ This military campaign proved to be extremely difficult, but he eventually succeeded in defeating the Vandals. Straight after that, he had to make his way to the Upper Danube to repulse the Juthungi, who were again invading Italy via Raetia. Aurelian suffered an initial defeat at Placentia. This news must have caused consternation in Rome (and prompted multiple usurpations in the empire³⁵⁴), as there was now no army standing between the barbarian Juthungi and their march on

³⁵² According to Watson (1999, 47), it was in the second half of September, while Southern (2004, 110) reckons it was in November.

³⁵³ Kienast (1996, 234) disagrees; he assumes that Aurelian wintered in Rome in 270/1.

³⁵⁴ Septimius, Domitianus, and Urbanus—these are all named by Zosimus (I, 49, 2) in connection with the Juthungian invasion; Septimius is also known from the *Epitome* (35, 3), which links his revolt with Dalmatia. Both sources agree that these usurpations were quickly put down. Domitianus is also mentioned by the *HA* (*Gall.* 2, 6; *Tyr. trig.* 12, 14; 13, 3), but doubts about whether he truly existed were not dispelled until 2003, when one of his coins was discovered in Oxfordshire (see Brandt, 2006, 20).

Rome. However, Aurelian was in hot pursuit of the invaders and, as soon as he caught up with them, defeated them at the Battle of the Metaurus. With negotiations between the two sides coming to naught, the Juthungi had no choice but to turn back. Aurelian remained on their trail, but held off attacking them until they were at a vulnerable place. His opportunity came near Ticinum. This time his victory was complete.³⁵⁵

At last, the emperor could enter Rome triumphantly. There, however, he was confronted with more problems. The *rationalis* Felicissimus, the official in charge of the mint in Rome, had been counterfeiting money. The sources are silent on the details,³⁵⁶ so all we know is that the mint workers (*monetarii*) staged a revolt and appear to have been joined by other sections of the population³⁵⁷; there may have been political overtones to their actions.³⁵⁸ Whatever the case, Aurelian's response was immediate and very forceful; several thousand people died in the fighting in the city. As for the currency system, which was a shambles, substantial reform would have to wait for the time being. Aurelian closed the Rome mint for two years. When he had it reopened, it had fewer workshops (*officinae*) than before and never regained its former privileged position.

At this time, Aurelian began to implement his grand project: as Rome had long outgrown its former republican limits, he decided to surround

³⁵⁵ We cannot be sure of the chronology or sequence of Aurelian's wars with the barbarians in the first year of his reign. The reconstruction provided here was put together according to Watson (1999, 50–52) and Hartmann (2008, 312–313). Drinkwater (2007, 72–78), on the other hand, believes that Aurelian went to war first with the Juthungi and then with the Vandals.

³⁵⁶ It is also unclear how *antoniniani* could be adulterated any further when they had already been debased by the government itself on so many occasions that, as we have seen, they were at most only faintly silvered at this time. The alternatives are that the counterfeiting actually involved gold *aurei* or that Felicissimus was simply siphoning off the precious metals entrusted to him.

³⁵⁷ Eutr. IX, 14; Aur. Vict. 35, 6; *Epitome* 35, 4; *HA, Aurel.* 38, 2–3. Kienast (1996, 238) ranks Felicissimus among the few usurpers known from Aurelian's time. Hartmann (2008, 314), conversely, finds it unlikely that Felicissimus was usurping imperial power.

³⁵⁸ Zosimus (I, 49, 2) makes no mention of Felicissimus or the mint, but states vaguely that in this early period of Aurelian's reign there were disturbances in Rome which resulted in the execution of some senators who were accused of conspiring against the emperor. Watson (1999, 161) believes these are likely to have been the very senators who had earlier advocated the election of Quintillus over Aurelian. On the other hand, Aurelian undoubtedly sought a good relationship with the senate as a whole; in 271, he entered the consulship with the eminent senator Pomponius Bassus.

the city with solid walls that could protect it from sudden sacking (the recent Juthungi invasion exposed how real this threat was). The city had previously been protected by its sheer distance from the empire's borders, which were safely guarded by legions, but by Aurelian's reign neither Rome nor any other inland city enjoyed the luxury of a sense of secure any more, so various cities hastily repaired their walls or built new ones in this time of barbarian incursions. Aurelian, who was preparing for a major campaign against Zenobia, could not leave Rome unprotected, yet nor could he leave a large section of his army in Italy. New walls were therefore a strategic necessity. Running for almost 19 km, they were of a simple design intended to shield the city from the enemy's initial attack and deter anyone from trying to lay siege to it. Although the ramparts were built apace, they were not actually completed until the reign of Probus; from that time onwards, they were improved and repaired many times.³⁵⁹ There was one more tangible (and welcome) benefit that Aurelian could offer the people of Rome: since the time of Septimius Severus, Rome's inhabitants had been accustomed to free rations of grain and oil (called the *annona*)³⁶⁰; Aurelian now added to this generosity the distribution of pork and salt and replaced rations of grain with rations of bread.³⁶¹ It is possible that he also sold wine at reduced prices.³⁶²

In this regard, the emperor was willing to attend to Rome's current needs, but he stayed in the city only as long as necessary, and in the summer of 271 he went East to wage his campaign against Zenobia. On the way, he was forced to stop off at the Lower Danube after encountering Goths led by a *dux* the *HA* names as "Cannabas or Cannabaudes". Aurelian drove him and his Goths across the Danube and defeated them in a battle in which both the Goth leader himself and 5,000 of his men were

³⁵⁹ Improvements were made to the ramparts by Maxentius in the early fourth century and by Stilicho in the early fifth century, and they were repaired several times in the fifth and sixth centuries (for the last time by Belisarius when Justinian was at war with the Ostrogoths); see Watson (1999, 151–152).

³⁶⁰ Lo Cascio, "The Emperor and His Administration", 163.

³⁶¹ *Chron.* 354, 148, in Mommsen 1892 (*panem oleum et sal populo iussit dari gratuite*). Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 140; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 270; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 123.

³⁶² Lo Cascio, "The Emperor and His Administration", 165. According to the *HA* (*Aurel.* 48, 1–4), Aurelian allegedly intended to distribute wine free of charge, but was talked out of it by his praetorian prefect.

slain.³⁶³ This removed the Gothic threat in the Lower Danube area for at least the next 50 years.³⁶⁴

It is highly likely that this campaign prompted Aurelian to withdraw Roman troops and the Roman provincial administration from Dacia.³⁶⁵ Our sources report that this province, established by Trajan across the Danube, had already been effectively lost in Gallienus' time³⁶⁶; now Aurelian evidently realised that the empire could afford the luxury of defending the expansive area beyond the Danube, already largely controlled by the Goths and other barbarians, even less than it was able to maintain garrisons in the *Agri Decumates*.³⁶⁷ We do not know, however, whether Aurelian actually intended the army's withdrawal from Dacia to be a permanent rather than a temporary measure. In any event, the two legions stationed in Dacia, *V Macedonica* and *XIII Gemina*, were withdrawn to

³⁶³ *HA, Aurel.* 22, 2 (*Cannabas sive Cannabauden*). Cf. *HA, Aurel.* (33, 3), which mentions the spoils of this war, including a chariot said to have belonged to "the king of the Goths" (*rex Gothorum*). See also Eutr. IX, 13; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 23. Southern (2004, 116) suggests that this Cannabaudes was actually Cniva, who had triumphed over the emperor Decius in 251, but that is unlikely (how come we hear nothing of him during the large-scale Gothic invasions at the time of Gallienus?); Kulikowski (2007, 20) points out that we cannot even be sure he really existed. In any event, the name is Germanic (Schönfeld 1911, 60), and the *HA* is quite possibly simply telling us its short and full forms.

³⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXI, 5, 17), in his summary of the Gothic wars, states that the Goths were driven off by Aurelian, and afterwards (except for sorties by insignificant marauding bands) their incursions ceased for a very long time (*per Aurelianum, acrem virum et severissimum noxarum ultorem, pulsus per longa saecula siluerunt immobiles, nisi quod postea latrocinales globi vicina cum sui exitio rarius incurabant*). And indeed, we have no further record of hostile Gothic activity in the area until 323 (Doležal, 2018). Aurelian's Gothic victory is also documented by the emperor's victory title *Gothicus maximus*, attested by a number of inscriptions (Peachin, 1990, 394–399) and coins bearing the legend *VICTORIAE GOTHIC(AE)* (Webb, 1972a, 303).

³⁶⁵ Southern (2004, 120) leans towards 272–273.

³⁶⁶ Eutr. IX, 8 (*Dacia, quae a Traiano ultra Danubium fuerat adiecta, tum amissa, Graecia, Macedonia, Pontus, Asia vastata est per Gothos*); Oros. *Hist.* VII, 22 (*Graecia, Macedonia, Pontus, Asia Gothorum inundatione delentur. Nam Dacia trans Danubium in perpetuum aufertur*). Cf. Festus 8.

³⁶⁷ Eutr. IX, 15 (*provinciam Daciam, quam Traianus ultra Danubium fecerat, intermisit, vastato omni Illyrico et Moesia, desperans eam posse retinere, abductosque Romanos ex urbibus et agris Daciae in media Moesia collocavit appellavitque eam Daciam*); *HA, Aurel.* 39, 7 (*provinciam Transdanuvinam Daciam a Traiano constitutam sublato exercitu et provincialibus reliquit, desperans eam posse retineri, abductosque ex ea populos in Moesia collocavit appellavitque suam Daciam*). Cf. Festus 8.

the Danube and redeployed to the cities of Oescus and Ratiaria.³⁶⁸ Some, but by no means all, of the civilian population left with the soldiers; archaeological finds testify to the continuity of habitation in Roman settlements and farms in Dacia.³⁶⁹ It is impossible to determine how many civilians followed the army and how those who remained assimilated with the new population that now began to pour into Dacia from all sides.³⁷⁰

The fact of the matter is that Dacia began to be occupied by Goths, Vandals, Gepids, Taifali, Carpi, and other tribes, and it took some time for the situation to settle down and for the tribal boundaries between the various ethnic groups to be drawn. The Goths became the dominant group on the Lower Danube, hence the (albeit later) name *Gothia* for this area³⁷¹ and the name *ripa Gothica* for the banks of the Danube. The Goths also appear most frequently in the sources that mention this former Roman land. Around the time that Dacia was evacuated, the Goths began to split into Visigoths and Ostrogoths; the border between them was roughly the territory of present-day Moldova (the rivers Dniester and Prut).³⁷² At a later stage, wars broke out between these tribes as they vied for control of Dacia; the fighting was so fierce that even the Romans took notice. The orator Mamertinus, who in 291 delivered a panegyric at the birthday celebrations of the emperor Maximian, summarised these events all too briefly and at the expense of clarity: “The Goths completely slaughter the Burgundians; the Alamanni and the Thervingi bear arms for the conquered; another group of Goths, together with a band of Taifali, attack the Vandals and Gepids”.³⁷³ In the final phase (which we will

³⁶⁸ Hartmann, “Claudius Gothicus und Aurelianus”, 315.

³⁶⁹ Hartmann, “Claudius Gothicus und Aurelianus”, 316.

³⁷⁰ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 121 and 325.

³⁷¹ *HA, Maxim.* 1, 5; *Oros. Hist.* I, 2, 53 (*in medio Dacia ubi et Gothia*); *Jord. Get.* 67 and 73–74.

³⁷² Wilkes, “Provinces and Frontiers”, 229.

³⁷³ *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 17 (*Gothi Burgundos penitus excidunt, rursumque pro victis armantur Alamanni itemque Tervingi; pars alia Gothorum adiuncta manu Taifalorum adversum Vandalos Gipedesque concurrunt*). Punctuation is very important in this passage, especially the semi-colon after “Thervingi”. I am following the Latin text according to Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 541). An alternative translation would be: “The Goths completely slaughter the Burgundians; the Alamanni bear arms for the conquered; meanwhile, the Thervingi, another group of Goths, together with a band of Taifali, attack the Vandals and Gepids”.

discuss in the next chapter), the Goths ousted certain peoples—specifically the Bastarnae and Carpi—from Dacia, forcing them towards Roman territory.

As far as the Romans were concerned, the main consequence of getting out of Dacia was that the frontier was shortened, evidently freeing up troops that could be used for Aurelian's Eastern campaign. Most importantly, the border could now be thoroughly secured, giving the Danubian provinces an opportunity to recover from the barbarian incursions. At the same time, Aurelian created the new province of Dacia (centred on Serdica) by taking territory from both Moesias; Aurelian's new Dacia was subsequently divided into two provinces, *Dacia Ripensis* and *Dacia Mediterranea*.³⁷⁴

All this took the emperor some time—probably the whole of the second half of 271. Aurelian could not continue eastwards until he had found a solution to Dacia and the Goths. The emperor was in no hurry. He could ill afford to fail at this stage. His campaigns to date had been necessitated by circumstances, and so far he had always been more or less passively responding to crisis; this time, he was embarking on an uncertain adventure with determination and full of purpose. Zenobia's army—especially her heavy cavalry—inspired respect. After all, the Palmyrenes had repeatedly defeated the Persians and managed to hold them in check for 10 years. Aurelian thus moved from the Lower Danube to the Bosphorus. He wintered in Byzantium in 271/2,³⁷⁵ where he amassed a large army and no doubt a fleet, as he was intent on regaining control of Egypt as a sideshow to his main operation against Syria. The chronology of these operations is uncertain, but it looks like Aurelian's fleet succeeded in landing troops in the Nile delta and securing Egypt for the emperor in

³⁷⁴ This occurred under either Probus or Carus (see Hartmann, 2008, 315). Cf. Barnes (1982, 216–217), who suggests that it was Aurelian who formed these two provinces.

³⁷⁵ According to Southern (2008, 116), Hartmann (2008, 316). Kienast (1996, 234) and Barnes (2014, 35) assume that Aurelian spent this winter in Rome (although Kienast also dates the war against the Goths and the evacuation of Dacia to 272).

May or June 272.³⁷⁶ Zenobia, concentrating on the defence of Syria, had plainly not been expecting a strike from that side.

By this time, however, the main forces, under the command of the emperor himself, were already on the move.³⁷⁷ It was probably in April 272 that Aurelian and his army sailed into Asia Minor and quickly passed through Bithynia, where they were welcomed by the local population; the same scenario was repeated in Galatia. Aurelian first encountered resistance in Cappadocia, where the city of Tyana closed its gates to him. According to the *HA*'s author, this enraged the emperor. In his anger, he cried out that he would not leave a dog alive in Tyana (*canem in hoc oppido non relinquam*). When, during the siege, he finally took possession of Tyana through the treachery of one of its citizens, the soldiers demanded that they be allowed to sack the city, reminding him of his earlier outburst. The emperor replied, "I said I would not leave a dog alive in this city; kill all the dogs!" (*canem negavi in hac urbe me relic-turum: canes omnes occidite!*).³⁷⁸ The soldiers, appreciating the emperor's joke, killed the dogs and left the townspeople and their possessions alone.

³⁷⁶ Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, 132; Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 71. According to the *HA* (*Prob.* 9, 5), the commander who took Egypt for Aurelian was the future emperor Probus. This is plausible (and not doubted, for example, by Stoneman, 1995, 165), but it is just as possible that the *HA* has confused him with another commander named Tenagino Probus, the *praefectus Aegypti* who was defeated and killed when Zenobia took possession of Egypt (270); see Zos. I, 44. This Probus, in his previous role as *praeses Numidiae* (268–269), had put down a revolt that is also mentioned by the *HA* (*Prob.* 9, 1–2); again, the *HA* attributes this suppression (incorrectly) to the future emperor Probus. This matter therefore remains contentious. Cf. *PLRE I*, 736 and 740–741, Probus 3 and Probus 8.

³⁷⁷ Aurelian had probably assigned some of his men to various tasks in Asia Minor in advance, in the spring of 271, knowing that he wanted to pass through the territory as quickly as possible in the following year in order to strike at Zenobia, preferably in Syria. As we have already noted, in 271 there was a blurred line running through Asia Minor between Aurelian's empire and Zenobia's dominion—evidently between Paphlagonia and Pamphylia. Aurelian's *protector* (or tribune) Constantius, father of the emperor Constantine, was probably in Bithynia in June 271, suggesting that he too was one of those imperial appointees that had gone on ahead. In this context, Barnes (2014, 37) recalls a tomb inscription (*ILS* 2775) that mentions one of Aurelian's *protectores*, a man named Claudius Herculanus who lived to be 40 years old and was buried in Nicomedia by his brother Claudius Dionysius, another *protector*. Barnes infers from this inscription that Constantius may have travelled through Bithynia in the company of these two brothers. While this is mere speculation, it does support the hypothesis that Aurelian was calculated and systematic in his plans to conquer the East.

³⁷⁸ *HA, Aurel.* 22, 5–6; 23, 2–4.

Aurelian had to tread carefully here, for an army deprived of its spoils could easily turn against its own commander.³⁷⁹ At the same time, he wanted to avoid unnecessary reprisals since he needed to reach Syria as quickly as possible; he hoped that his moderate approach would convince the other cities of Asia Minor that they had nothing to fear. Aurelian was one of those few emperors who not only commanded their army personally in the field, but also kept it firmly under their control.

In this context, it is curious that Aurelian gained a reputation for cruelty in some sources. Eutropius says that Aurelian was capable of extreme cruelty (*ultima crudelitate*) and that his whole reign was defined by harshness (*trux omni tempore*). He concludes his characterisation of the emperor by claiming that, although Aurelian's brutality was necessary, the emperor showed kindness to no one (*necessarius magis in quibusdam quam in ullo amabilis imperator*).³⁸⁰ The author of the *HA* broadly agrees with this description, observing that, as an emperor, Aurelian was “more necessary than good” (*principi necessario magis quam bono*).³⁸¹ This, incidentally, is an example where two writers (in this case Eutropius and the author of the *Historia Augusta*) probably followed a common source, the *Kaisergeschichte* (see Chapter 1). Even so, it is in the *HA* that we find the above-mentioned evidence of the emperor's leniency. Other sources—Aurelius Victor and Zosimus—know nothing of Aurelian's cruelty, and their descriptions of Aurelian's reign sound quite different.³⁸²

The legend of Aurelian's avarice originated along the same lines. According to Ammianus (XXX, 8, 8), faced with an empty treasury, Aurelian tried to improve this sorry state of affairs by confiscating the property of wealthy citizens (*post Gallienum et lamentabilis rei publicae casus exinanito aerario torrentis ritu ferebatur in divites*). Potter, however, reminds us that sources contemporaneously closer to Aurelian (Zosimus, based on Eunapius) are silent on this.³⁸³ The *Historia Augusta* actually tells us the exact opposite, again in connection with the conquest of Tyana. Although the emperor is said to have intended to sack the city and

³⁷⁹ This was the end that befell Postumus in his “Gallic Empire”; see above.

³⁸⁰ Eutr. IX, 14.

³⁸¹ *HA*, *Aurel.* 37, 1.

³⁸² Aur. Vict. 35, 1–14; Zos. I, 48–62.

³⁸³ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 270.

massacre its inhabitants, in the end he had only one person executed – the very man who had placed Tyana into his hands; and although this individual was reportedly a rich man, Aurelian left his fortune to his children so that, as he himself allegedly said, “no one can say that I had a rich man killed for money” (*ne quis me causa pecuniae locupletem hominem occidi passum esse criminaretur*).³⁸⁴

The emperor’s light-touch approach towards the cities of Asia Minor paid off handsomely. He and his army made their way unhindered through Tarsus and Issus into Syria, and beheld Antioch in May. East of that major city, in a battle fought on horseback at the town of Immae, Aurelian crushed Queen Zenobia’s formidable heavy cavalry. Here, Aurelian used the tactic of feigned retreat. This type of feint required courage, coordination, and a great deal of discipline—again a testament to how tightly Aurelian controlled his troops. Zenobia, comprehensively defeated, had no choice but to retreat from Antioch to Emesa. Aurelian’s army entered Antioch in an orderly fashion, and the emperor declared a general amnesty for Zenobia’s followers. In the meantime, reinforcements had arrived. He attached them to his army and proceeded south towards Emesa. There was no need to waste time besieging towns on the way, for they surrendered to him one by one. The emperor knew that he would now need every last man because Zenobia was certainly not going to lay down her arms at Emesa. According to Zosimus, she had mustered a huge army of some 70,000 soldiers.³⁸⁵ This time, the battle was fierce and the Romans suffered many casualties, but the Palmyrene army was obliterated. Zenobia retreated to Palmyra, with Aurelian in pursuit. It was summer and the move to Palmyra was exhausting. Aurelian’s offers of negotiation were rebuffed by Zenobia. He did, however, manage to win over Zenobia’s Arab allies, and laid siege to Palmyra. Zenobia, now in dire straits, attempted to flee to Persia in order to obtain aid or, failing that, asylum. She secretly slipped out of the city one night on a camel, but Aurelian, learning that she was making a run for it, sent a detachment of cavalry after the queen and captured her. After that, the city capitulated. Aurelian entered Palmyra and again acted as peaceably as possible. He had Zenobia’s advisers arrested and later

³⁸⁴ *HA, Aurel.* 23, 5.

³⁸⁵ *Zos.* 1, 52, 3.

executed, and confiscated the city's wealth, including the temple treasures, but did no harm to the population. He also left a garrison in the city, though it was modest in size because, following the death of the great Persian king Shapur I (probably in 270), Aurelian had nothing to fear from Persia in the east: none of Shapur's immediate successors—his sons Hormizd (270–271) and Bahram I (271–274) and Bahram's son Bahram II (274–293)—attempted any confrontation with Rome.³⁸⁶ Indeed, after the fall of Palmyra, the Persians rushed to assure Aurelian of their peaceful intentions.

The spoils were great, yet more significant still was the restoration of Roman prestige and the Romans' reputation throughout the East in the eyes of both the Eastern provinces and the outside world, especially Persia. The emperor could therefore return to Europe with his army and leave organisational matters connected with the restoration of Roman provincial administration in the East in the hands of his own people, and specifically one Marcellinus. However, as soon as Aurelian landed in Byzantium, he learnt that the Carpi had made an incursion into Roman territory. He defeated them and drove them across the Danube, probably in 272. Some of the Carpi settled in Roman territory, but we do not know exactly where. The Senate bestowed on him the title of *Carpicus maximus* in recognition of this achievement.³⁸⁷ For his conquest of the East, the emperor had himself hailed on his coins as Restorer of the World (*Restitutor orbis*) and Restorer of the East (*Restitutor Orientis*).³⁸⁸

As it turned out, the emperor was perhaps too merciful. "It is rare and difficult for the Syrians to maintain loyalty", said the author of the

³⁸⁶ Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians", 127–128. The next war between the Romans and Persians would come in 283 and was provoked by the Roman emperor Carus (see below).

³⁸⁷ Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 80. Hartmann (2008, 318) dates the Carpic invasion and the award of the victory title to the spring of 273. War with the Carpi: *HA, Aurel.* 30, 4. Partial displacement of the Carpi: *Aur. Vict.* 39, 43. Peachin (1990, 91–92) enumerates all Aurelian's victory titles: he had been awarded the victory title *Germanicus maximus* (270 or 271) for his triumph over the Juthungi, and the title *Gothicus maximus* (271) for defeating the Goths, and now, in 272, he had earned the titles *Carpicus maximus* and *Persicus maximus* for his victories over the Carpi and the Palmyrenes. Other unconfirmed victory titles are mentioned by the *HA (Aurel.* 30, 5).

³⁸⁸ *Restitutor orbis*: Webb (1972a, 297–299, 304, 306 and 308–310), Southern (2008, 146). *Restitutor Orientis*: Webb (1972a, 290, 304, 307 and 310).

HA wisely.³⁸⁹ Some Palmyrene nobles, entertaining notions of resistance, set about persuading Marcellinus, Aurelian's man in charge of the Syrian region, to seize imperial power. Buying time, Marcellinus made excuses, before secretly and promptly apprising the emperor of all this. Upon receiving this news, Aurelian immediately left the Balkans and headed back to Syria. When he arrived in Palmyra in early 273, he found that the Palmyrenes had slaughtered the Roman garrison here. Having given up their attempts to win Marcellinus over, they had declared a certain relative of Zenobia, on whose name our sources are divided, to be their king.³⁹⁰ The rapidity of Aurelian's arrival took the rebels by surprise. The emperor quickly captured Palmyra and, according to Zosimus' account, "razed it to the ground".³⁹¹ This is a gross exaggeration. Certainly, some destruction did accompany the sacking of the city, but the Temple of Bel, its dominant feature, survived both of Aurelian's conquests unscathed; the same can be said of other well-known buildings in the city³⁹² (which suffered far more damage at the hands of Islamic fanatics in 2015). Despite the assertions of the *HA*, it is also unlikely that the inhabitants were massacred.³⁹³ Even so, the city lost its erstwhile importance as a crossroads for caravans and never regained its former glory.

Aurelian's next challenge was Egypt, more precisely some sort of revolt in Alexandria, about which we are only very patchily informed. The emperor was able to move quickly from Syria to Alexandria, where he had the rebels' leader executed and reimposed order.³⁹⁴ Now he could finally repair to Rome and prepare for the campaign that would complete his efforts to restore the empire: it was time to annihilate the "Gallic Empire". When, after Postumus' death, a certain Marius became the

³⁸⁹ *HA, Aurel.* 31, 1.

³⁹⁰ Achilles: *HA, Aurel.* 31, 2; Antiochos: *Zos.* I, 60, 2.

³⁹¹ *Zos.* I, 61, 1. Similarly, *HA (Aurel.* 31, 3) asserts that Aurelian was said to have destroyed the city (*urbem* [...] *evertit*).

³⁹² Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, 154.

³⁹³ *HA, Aurel.* 31, 4–10.

³⁹⁴ This rebel, Firmus, is attested only by the author of the *HA*, who even wrote a biography for him (*HA, Quadr. Tyr.* 3–6) despite being unsure as to whether Firmus even claimed imperial dignity.

West's new ruler, he reigned for a few weeks at most.³⁹⁵ The soldiers, dissatisfied with his leadership, assassinated him and proclaimed one of Postumus' commanders, Victorinus, emperor. He, in turn, was assassinated two years later (this time by one of his officers for personal reasons). The next—and last—ruler of this separatist empire was the governor of Aquitaine, Tetricus.³⁹⁶ When this senator became emperor in the spring or summer of 271, Aurelian was busy in the Balkans, dealing with the Gothic invasion, evacuating Dacia, and plotting war against Palmyra. He clearly felt that there was no threat from the West. How so? Because when Aurelian marched against Tetricus in early 274, the “Gallic Empire” was not in the best of shape. Aside from the fact that it was being menaced by the Germani, southern Gaul and Hispania were already under the control of the central government, and the rest was politically unstable. Of the little we can glean, we know that Tetricus was having trouble with one of his governors, Faustinus, who had declared himself emperor, presumably in Trier. However, we cannot say for sure whether this (very short-lived) revolt took place in 274 or earlier. Some sources suggest that Tetricus was losing control of his army.³⁹⁷ The fact of the matter was that Tetricus was unable to rely on the undivided loyalty of his people. Moreover, his military strength was less than Aurelian's fear-inducing, battle-hardened army personally commanded by a leader who (with the one exception of the Battle of Placentia early on in his reign) had never been defeated. Considering how bleak Tetricus' prospects were, it is understandable that, in desperation, he secretly made contact with Aurelian in an attempt to negotiate his surrender. What is harder to fathom is the outcome of their collusion (if any): the two armies actually went into battle, which, though

³⁹⁵ Aurelius Victor (33, 12) says he lasted for just two days, but this cannot be true because coins of Marius have been preserved that were struck at two mints and in several types and series. See Webb (1972b, 374–378).

³⁹⁶ Most modern scholars (see Potter, 2004, 272; Southern, 2004, 118–119; Watson, 1999, 89–91) list the reigns of these “Gallic emperors” as follows: Marius (269), Victorinus (269–271), and Tetricus (271–274). Cf. Bird (1994, 149) (“Tetricus probably ruled from 270 to 273”); *PLRE I*, 965, Victorinus 12; 885, Tetricus 1.

³⁹⁷ Kienast (1996, 249) places Faustinus' revolt in 273, *PLRE I* (326, Faustinus 1) suggests it was around 272. Watson (1999, 92–94), Potter (2004, 272), Southern (2004, 119), and Hartmann (2008, 318) date Aurelian's campaign against Tetricus to the spring of 274. Tetricus' loss of control over the army is hinted at by Aurelius Victor (35, 4), Eutropius (IX, 13), and the *HA* (*Aurel.* 32, 3; *Tyr. trig.* 24, 2).

victorious for Aurelian, apparently resulted in carnage.³⁹⁸ Tetricus placed himself into Aurelian's hands and was pardoned; but if he had intended to surrender all along, why have a battle in the first place?³⁹⁹ Surely it was in the interests of both sides to spare the lives of as many soldiers as possible, and to secure Gaul with their help instead. It seems, then, that this collusion is either a fabrication of 4th-century historiography, or that it did exist, but things did not go according to plan—Aurelius Victor says that Tetricus was supposed to array his men in battle formation but not actually fight (*producta ad speciem acie inter pugnam se dedit*). This is such a highly complicated and risky plan that it is no wonder it did not work out. If Tetricus and Aurelian had indeed agreed on this arrangement, then there was probably no alternative—Tetricus' generals may have been determined to fight come what may. Tetricus saved his life by defecting during the battle, but many of his soldiers were not in on the plan and fought to the bitter end. In any event, in the autumn of 274, Tetricus and Zenobia were led through Rome in triumph.⁴⁰⁰ Apart from subjecting them to this humiliation, however, Aurelian was more than gracious to them: Zenobia lived out her days in comfort and luxury in Rome, and Tetricus was given the governorship of Lucania.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ According to Eutropius (IX, 13), the battle took place on the Catalaunian Plains (*apud Catalaunos*; near present-day Châlons-en-Champagne, France). Aur. Vict. 35, 3 hints that Tetricus suffered heavy losses (*Tetrici caesae legiones*); cf. Pan. Lat. V (8), 4, 3 (*clade Catalaunica*). Conversely, the HA (*Aurel.* 32, 3) says that Tetricus' legions surrendered to Aurelian (*deditas sibi legiones optinuit*).

³⁹⁹ Watson (1999, 94) ponders this question and concludes that the collusion between the two emperors is a fiction of ancient historiography. It is mentioned only by Aurelius Victor (35, 4) and Eutropius (IX, 13). Other sources simply state that Tetricus "betrayed his army", e.g. Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 273 (*Aurelianus, Tetrico apud Catalaunos prodente exercitum suum, Gallias recepit*); HA, *Aurel.* 32, 3 (*ipso Tetrico exercitum suum prodente*). Eutropius and the HA (*Tyr. trig.* 24, 3) even mention a verse that Tetricus allegedly sent to Aurelian in a letter. An authentic quotation from Virgil (*Aeneis* VI, 365), it reads: "Deliver me from these afflictions, O indomitable one" (*eripe me his, invicte, malis*).

⁴⁰⁰ This was a spectacular event that the author of the HA (*Aurel.* 33–34) describes in great detail, including the number of exotic animals and the names of the nations conquered.

⁴⁰¹ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 274 (*Tetricus corrector postea Lucaniae fuit et Zenobia in urbe summo honore consenuit*); for a discussion on why the term *corrector* is so problematic for such an early period, see Lo Cascio (2008, 168–169). Only Malalas (XII, 30) says that the queen was beheaded; this is contradicted by the accounts presented by all other sources.

Once in Rome, Aurelian spent the rest of 274⁴⁰² and most of 275 preoccupied by organisational matters and two major projects: monetary reform and the construction of the Temple of the Sun. Aurelian's currency reform was the most radical since the time of the emperor Augustus. Sadly, apart from the coins themselves, which have been found in abundance, the only account we have of this reform is a brief mention by Zosimus, who says that Aurelian “introduced a new coinage system based on a silver coin; in doing so, he ordered the people to surrender counterfeit coins, thus putting an end to confusion in trade”.⁴⁰³ By “counterfeit coins”, Zosimus probably means not only coins minted by the central government in the previous few years, which had negligible silver content, but perhaps also, and in particular, coins minted in the newly conquered separatist “Gallic Empire”, which were even more debased than those struck by Aurelian.⁴⁰⁴

In any event, by conquering the East and West, Aurelian gained full access to silver resources, enabling him to more than double the silver content of *antoniniani* from less than 2% to about 5% (due to the wear of the coins, this figure is usually closer to 4% in analyses today) and to increase their weight (to about 4 *g*). This coin, which was also struck to a finer quality than earlier *antoniniani*, is sometimes called the *aurelianus*, but there is no consensus on its value in *denarii*, which were also being newly minted (with an approximate weight of 2.6 *g*); estimates vary from 2 to 25 *denarii*.⁴⁰⁵ Aurelian's “reformed *antoninianus*” was stamped “XXI”, a mark usually understood to mean a 1:20 ratio between silver and copper in this coin; in other words, 20 of these *antoniniani* with a 5% silver content corresponded to one (hypothetical) pure-silver

⁴⁰² According to Watson (1999, 128), Aurelian began his coinage reform a bit earlier, at the end of 273.

⁴⁰³ Zosimus 1, 61, 3.

⁴⁰⁴ See Estiot (2012, 547). In the last year of Postumus' reign and under Victorinus, there was a sharp decline in the silver content of the coins they minted. During Tetricus' reign, the silver content shrank to a risible 0.5% (in 273). Not only that, but these coins and the gold *aurei* were made lighter. See Southern (2004, 112–113); Watson (1999, 245, footnote 9). Although the coins of the “Gallic Empire” were “fake” politically, they were not counterfeit, but merely debased. Watson (1999, 127) also suggests that Zosimus may be referring to money counterfeited by Felicissimus; this is dubious when we consider that more than two years had passed since his revolt (and, as already mentioned, silver *antoniniani* were hardly counterfeitable at that time).

⁴⁰⁵ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 340–341.

coin.⁴⁰⁶ The emperor, depicted as ever on the obverse of the coin, is crowned with a rayed diadem, which is why this type of coin is called the *radiatus* (the Latin *radius* means ray).

The emperor also increased the weight of the *aureus*, the purity of which had already been restored (back to 99%) by his predecessor Claudius Gothicus. In the first century, the *aureus* weighed just over 7 g; by the first half of the third century it was half that.⁴⁰⁷ Aurelian pushed it back up to 6.45 g—almost its original level. However, it is far from clear what the exchange rate of *aurei* to silver coins⁴⁰⁸ was at the time of his reform, or when exactly in the third century the 1:25 ratio between *aurei* and *denarii* ceased to apply.

Aurelian also minted small bronze coins (*sestertii*, *dupondii* and *asses*) that had previously disappeared from circulation (as already mentioned, they were gradually rendered worthless by debased silver coins and rising inflation). This measure speaks volumes about how conservative Aurelian's reform was; it was intended to set the coinage system back 50 years. We do not know the convertibility of these small coins into silver or gold coins, and hence their face value, but that is not really relevant: these coins were minted only in Rome and only in small quantities, and were thus effectively no more than a tribute to the Roman tradition of minting these coins; they were of no practical significance.⁴⁰⁹

Potter ascribes political rather than economic reasons to Aurelian's reform, arguing that he unnecessarily brought chaos to the existing system, as people had long been accustomed to the declining quality of silver coins; what was of essence, however, was the rate at which silver currency was converted into gold *aurei*. Although this rate is not known to us, it was sure to have been protected by the government. Provided that the purity and weight of gold coins were kept to a reasonable level, silver coins could be a medium of payment which retained its

⁴⁰⁶ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 123; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 273; Estiot, "The Later Third Century", 547. For other interpretations, see Corbier (2008, 341).

⁴⁰⁷ The state was evidently trying to maintain the rate of exchange between gold and silver coins (1 *aureus* = 25 *denarii*) for as long as possible; see Corbier (2008, 343).

⁴⁰⁸ E.g. Estiot (2012, 549) proposes a rate of 1 *aureus* to 400 *antoniniani* under Aurelian. Potter (2004, 392) suggests that, by the early 280s, a rate of 1 *aureus* to 1,000 *antoniniani* was in effect.

⁴⁰⁹ Estiot, "The Later Third Century", 546.

face value regardless of the precious metal content and which the state could continue to guarantee.⁴¹⁰

However, well-intentioned the reform was, it did not ultimately make much of a difference. If we have understood the “XXI” mint mark correctly, perhaps the only key benefit of the reform was the government’s admission that the validity of the main coin in circulation—the *aurelianus* or reformed *antoninianus*—was based on the public’s confidence that 20 of these coins had the silver content of one pure-silver coin.⁴¹¹ This did not change the fact that, by then, the *antoninianus* had essentially become a modern type of coin (i.e. it was made from relatively cheap metals) and that it was actually the gold aureus which acted as a sort of “government guarantee” of the validity of all other coins.⁴¹²

There is also the consideration that, in the West, Tetricus’ highly debased coins, and even coins struck by Gallienus and Claudius II before him, remained in circulation long after Aurelian’s annexation of the “Gallic Empire”. Aurelian’s successors, it seems, were reluctant to release the better-quality coins from Rome into the Western provinces (in the knowledge that, according to the effect we now call Gresham’s law, they would probably have been immediately taken out of circulation and hoarded). Consequently, poor-quality coins circulated in the West until the first decades of the fourth century.⁴¹³

As mentioned above, the emperor had a temple built in Rome to the sun-god; consecrated in 274, it was richly decorated with booty from

⁴¹⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 273–274.

⁴¹¹ Estiot, “The Later Third Century”, 547.

⁴¹² For comparison: since a gram of gold is priced (at the time of writing) at €43.72—the value of one *aureus* would be almost €310 (if we were to consider nothing other than the price of the metal). If a gram of silver costs €0.50—a *denarius* (an early-empire one of high purity and weighing about 3.5 g) would have a value of €1.74 at most. A gram of copper costs one third of a eurocent, bronze is slightly cheaper and brass is the cheapest. The production cost of a four-gram *aurelianus* (with 5% silver) would be approximately €0.12, which is close to today’s rates (it costs between €0.04 and €0.08 to make a one-euro coin). Assuming a rate of 25 *antoniniani* per *aureus*, the Roman government would have wanted citizens to exchange one coin worth €310 for 25 coins worth a total of no more than €3. Naturally, we are disregarding all other factors here (e.g. the gold-to-silver ratio back then was 1:12; today it is 1:87). Even so, the overall picture is clear: all coins except *aurei* became tender of no manifest intrinsic value.

⁴¹³ Kropff, “Diocletian’s currency system”, 181; Estiot, “The Later Third Century”, 545.

Palmyra, and its priests were chosen from the senatorial class.⁴¹⁴ Aurelian also introduced games in honour of the sun deity.⁴¹⁵ Sol Invictus (“Invincible Sun”) also appears in abundance on Aurelian’s coins, usually with the legend *Soli Invicto* (“To the Invincible Sun”) and an image of the sun god, but also in the variants *Soli conservatori* (“To the Sun, the Conservator”), *Conservat(or) Aug(usti)* (“Conservator of the Emperor”), and *Sol dominus imperii Romani* (“The Sun, Lord of the Roman Empire”).⁴¹⁶ Admittedly, *Sol* the deity had already featured on the coins of previous emperors, such as Claudius Gothicus⁴¹⁷ and Gallienus,⁴¹⁸ and we have also seen that the sun cult was an age-old tradition in the Roman landscape. Aurelian’s championing of the sun deity may not have been revolutionary, but it was so intense that the *HA*’s author felt compelled to explain it by observing that Aurelian’s mother was said to have been a priestess of the sun god.⁴¹⁹ Somewhat more plausible is a claim made elsewhere by the *HA*’s author that Aurelian’s affinity with the sun deity was rooted in the fact that the emperor believed he had this god to thank for his victory in the East. After vanquishing Zenobia at Emesa, he is reported to have entered the Emesa Temple of Elagabalus “and there found the likeness of the deity whose favour he had known in the war”.⁴²⁰

As already noted, despite the numerous similarities, Elagabalus’ deity must be distinguished from Mithraism; it is also clear that Mithraism cannot be identified with Aurelian’s sun cult (even though Mithras is also

⁴¹⁴ *Chron.* 354, 148, in Mommsen 1892 (*templum Solis et castra in campo Agrippae dedicavit*). See Southern (2004, 124), Lo Cascio (2008, 165).

⁴¹⁵ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 275 (*primus agon Solis ab Aureliano constitutus*); *Chron.* 354, 148, in Mommsen 1892 (*agonem Solis instituit*).

⁴¹⁶ See Webb (1972a, 271, 274, 282, 299–300, 309 and 312) (*Soli Invicto*); 305 (*Soli conservatori*); 308 (*Conservat[or] Aug[usti]*); 301 (*Sol dominus imperii Romani*).

⁴¹⁷ With a depiction of the sun god: Webb (1972a, 213, 220, 223 and 230); with the legend *Soli Cons(ervatori) Aug(usti)*: Webb (1972a, 220).

⁴¹⁸ Webb (1972a, 140) (not only a depiction, but also the legend *Soli invicto*); 144, 152 and 155–156 (with the legends *Soli cons[ervatori] Aug[usti]* and *Soli invicto*), etc.

⁴¹⁹ *HA, Aurel.* 4, 2 (*sacerdos templi Solis*); cf. *HA, Aurel.* 5, 5. Halsberghe (1972, 130) believes this story is likely; Watson (1999, 197) considers it a subsequently constructed myth.

⁴²⁰ *HA, Aurel.* 25, 3–6. See Potter (2004, 271), Češka (2000, 23), Cf. Watson (1999, 194), who considers the story a later invention.

sometimes referred to with the adjective *Invictus*).⁴²¹ However, whether and to what extent Aurelian's sun cult is related to the god Elagabalus remains elusive. Certain scholars have linked the two cults,⁴²² others have reached general conclusions about the eastern origins of Aurelian's sun deity⁴²³ (although some of them have highlighted the role played by religious syncretism, which was common at the time and is apparent here in the fact that there was nothing actually oriental about the depiction of Sol Invictus⁴²⁴), and there are those that have pointedly kept their own counsel.⁴²⁵ Some even question the influence of the East, arguing that what we have here is a domestic Italian deity that had always been revered in Italy.⁴²⁶

We are left to ponder whether, like the religious reform introduced by the emperor Elagabalus, this was another case of solar henotheism. Watson argues that Aurelian sought no such thing and that his preference for a sun god had nothing to do with henotheism (let alone monotheism). *Sol* was not a supreme god, merely the emperor's personal favourite deity, to whom he devoted his time and affection and whose cult benefited from his financial largesse. In religion, as in everything else, Aurelian was conservative. Other gods were by no means excluded from worship, nor was their role deliberately diminished. Jupiter, Mars, and Fortuna, for example, appear with equal regularity on Aurelian's coins, as do Roma, Dacia, Concordia, and Victoria. In a nutshell: Aurelian was avoiding the mistake that Elagabalus had made.⁴²⁷

⁴²¹ Watson (1999, 195) recalls and Halsberghe (1972, 158) cites inscription *CIL* VI, 2151, from late 3rd- or 4th-century Rome, which belonged to a statue of the pagan priest and senator Junius Postumianus. He was both *pater patrum dei Solis Invicti Mithrae* (a Mithraist title) and *pontifex dei Solis* (a title stemming from the state sun cult), proof enough that two different cults are at play here.

⁴²² Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 21; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 272.

⁴²³ Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 40; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 35; Lo Cascio, "The Emperor and his Administration", 171.

⁴²⁴ Fowden, "Late Polytheism", 557; Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 69.

⁴²⁵ Watson (1999, 196) is at pains to stress that we are at the mercy of speculation here and that there is insufficient evidence to conclusively link Aurelian's sun cult to oriental cults.

⁴²⁶ Hijmans, *Sol Invictus*.

⁴²⁷ Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 196–198. Lo Cascio (2008, 171) disagrees, claiming that "his building of the temple of the Sun in the Campus Martius

Although the emperor was wrong in thinking that the sun god or any other god had anything to do with his victory in the East, at least he chose an entity that was very real and that, even today, rightly commands respect. A ball of white-hot hydrogen and helium equivalent to 330,000 earth masses cannot be ignored, even if it is 150 million km away. Nor did the popularity of the sun cult end with Aurelian; it was continued by Probus and other emperors, including Constantine.⁴²⁸ Later still, in the fourth century, the Christian church appropriated this sun cult, inasmuch as it simply made the festival of Sol Invictus' birthday (*dies natalis Solis invicti*), which fell on 25 December, Jesus' birthday, or, more specifically, our Christmas (since no one knew when Jesus was born).⁴²⁹

It is also hazy to what extent Aurelian considered himself a god. This is not a frivolous question. Towards the end of his reign, Aurelian had coins struck with the inscription *Imp(eratori) deo et domino Aureliano aug(usto)* ("For Emperor Aurelian, god and lord") on the obverse; other coins even had the inscription *Deo et domino nato Aureliano aug(usto)* ("For Emperor Aurelian, born a god and lord").⁴³⁰ Yet he was not alone: emperors from the era of the Principate had also claimed the title *dominus et deus* ("lord and god"), or at least *dominus*, for themselves. In Aurelian's time, this is part of a trend as we move towards Diocletian and the late empire. It is, however, the first time that such a title appears on coins. In this regard, Aurelian was simply an emperor ahead of his time.⁴³¹

was clearly an attempt to institute a new imperial religion of a monotheistic tendency based on the cult of Sol Invictus".

⁴²⁸ See, for example, the legend *solī invicto comiti aug.* on one of Probus' *aurei*, in Webb (1972b, 32). Constantine's worship of the sun god is discussed in Chapter 6.

⁴²⁹ Česka, *Zánik antického světa*, 70; Vidman, *Od Olympu k Panteonu*, 75; Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, 158–159. Cf. Hijmans (2003), who ascribes limited importance to the sun cult in Rome, and thus also considers it of little significance that the church leaders set this date for Jesus' birth.

⁴³⁰ Webb, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume V, Part I*, 299. What makes these coins even more interesting is the use of the dative on the obverse; the name and selection of the emperor's titles is usually in the nominative, e.g. *imp(erator) Aurelianus p(ius) f(elix) aug(ustus)*.

⁴³¹ Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, 180 and 187–188. Although most Principate emperors generally resisted being publicly and officially called or addressed by the title *dominus*, unofficially and privately at least some were so addressed, either orally or in writing (e.g. Trajan). Divine honours had been claimed as early as Caligula, and the full *dominus et deus* title first appears under Domitian. For further examples, see Doležal (2008).

This brings us to another religious matter—our sources cannot agree on Aurelian’s attitude towards Christians. If the emperor Aurelian did not persecute Christians, why did Constantine himself, in his speech to the bishops, mention Aurelian as one of the persecuting emperors?⁴³² According to another tradition, Aurelian had *intended* to begin persecuting Christians, but had second thoughts after a lightning bolt struck the ground near him.⁴³³ Or, we are told, he had barely dispatched orders to the provinces for Christians to be persecuted when he was assassinated.⁴³⁴ Clearly, the leaders of the church later *needed* to make Aurelian a persecutor, but we know not why; perhaps they were building on the legend of his cruelty. But then there is the consideration that Aurelian himself intervened in a dispute among the bishops after they specifically asked him to. Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch, had been removed by a council resolution on the ground of heresy, and a new bishop was elected in his place. Paul refused to leave the bishop’s seat in Antioch and, as this was a property rather than a religious dispute, the other bishops appealed to the emperor. The emperor ruled in their favour. This was the first direct involvement by a Roman emperor in the church’s internal affairs.⁴³⁵

Aurelian was assassinated out of the blue in October 275 in Thrace, in a place called Caenophrurium, a settlement between Heraclea (Perinthus) and Byzantium. What he was doing in Thrace is not entirely clear, but, for once, the *HA*’s author may have got it right in claiming that Aurelian was preparing for an expedition against Persia.⁴³⁶ Tellingly, Persia was weakened internally at this time, and Aurelian may have decided to seize this opportunity to strike. The motive we have been given for the assassination seems far-fetched: Zosimus and the *HA* (backed up by Aurelius Victor and Eutropius)⁴³⁷ report that Aurelian is said to have threatened

⁴³² *Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum* 24. Likewise, *Jord. Rom.* 290 (*cultoresque divini nominis persecutus est*).

⁴³³ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 23, 6; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 275. Eusebius (*HE* VII, 30, 21) also says that Aurelian had apparently just made *plans* to persecute the Christians when he died, prompting them to be scrapped.

⁴³⁴ Lact. *mort. pers.* 2–6 and 12–16.

⁴³⁵ Euseb. *HE* VII, 30, 19; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 220 and 268. See Watson (1999, 199).

⁴³⁶ *HA, Aurel.* 35, 4.

⁴³⁷ *Zos.* I, 62; *HA, Aurel.* 36; *Aur. Vict.* 35, 8; *Eutr.* IX, 15.

one of his men with punishment for some misdeed. The man in question, fearing for his life, made up a list of people whom the emperor supposedly intended to have executed, and included himself among them. He then passed it on to those officers of the emperor's bodyguard whose names he had listed. If this were indeed the case, it was a foolish decision on the part of all concerned because, in the end, every one of them was executed by order of Tacitus and Probus, the emperors who came after Aurelian's death. On the other hand, all the evidence suggests that this was not a conspiracy long in the making, as none of the conspirators attempted to declare himself emperor; the assassination took everyone else present by surprise and greatly saddened the soldiers in particular. Since Aurelian had no natural heir (nor had he designated anyone as his successor), and because the new emperor, whoever he was, would immediately be suspected of involvement in the plot, the absurdity of Aurelian's murder was crowned by an even more absurd situation, with the military and the senate courteously giving each other precedence as to who should elect the new emperor. These negotiations are said to have lasted "about six months", according to Aurelius Victor, but this is an utterly preposterous notion.⁴³⁸ In reality, it was perhaps only a few weeks⁴³⁹ before the empire got a new emperor, and in the circumstances it is not surprising that the senate decided who it would be.

Hardly surprising, then, that when the senate decided on a new emperor at the end of 275, it picked Tacitus, a highly respected and elderly senator (and consul in 273). The new emperor wasted no time in having Aurelian deified and immediately left Rome for Thrace to take command of the army and mete out severe punishment to the conspirators. It was at this time that the Goths (or Heruli) crossed the Azov and Black Seas and invaded Asia Minor. Whether this was sheer coincidence or whether the barbarians saw an opportunity for action while the shock waves of Aurelian's assassination were still reverberating around the Roman world, we cannot know. In any event, Tacitus was forced to spend his brief reign repelling them.⁴⁴⁰ In June 276, Tacitus himself was assassinated in Tyana, a city in Cappadocia, for reasons that remain

⁴³⁸ Aur. Vict. 35, 8–14; 36, 1. Cf. Eutr. IX, 15; Zos. I, 62.

⁴³⁹ Watson (1999, 110) estimates it would have taken 5–10 weeks; Potter (2004, 275) suggests 6 weeks; Southern (2004, 126) says 2 months.

⁴⁴⁰ Zosimus (I, 63, 1), as usual, calls them "Scythians". Hartmann (2008, 316) concludes that they were more likely Goths.

unclear.⁴⁴¹ Florian, Tacitus' half-brother whom he had made his praetorian prefect, now had himself declared emperor by his soldiers, but was killed by them in the late summer of 276 at Tarsus as he was planning to go into battle against Probus, a general who was evidently in command of the army in Syria and Egypt. It was then Probus' turn to have his men declare him emperor.⁴⁴²

Marcus Aurelius Probus hailed from Sirmium, which means that, following the brief hiatus when Tacitus and Florian held power, we are now returning to the line of Illyrian emperors that began with Claudius and continued with Quintillus and Aurelian. Probus was clearly one of Aurelian's prominent generals; we have already seen that it was evidently he who secured Egypt for his emperor. Upon being elected emperor himself, he defeated the Goths (or Heruli) in Asia Minor who had escaped Tacitus. He then marched to the Middle Danube and spent the first few months of 277 in this region, probably in Siscia. Subsequently, in 277 and 278, he sought to secure Gaul from the Franks and Alamanni, who, taking advantage of the situation after Aurelian's death, "roamed untroubled not only on our bank [the Rhine], but throughout Gaul".⁴⁴³ Probus expelled them, re-secured the Rhine frontier, ordered the fortification of Gallic towns,⁴⁴⁴ and created a system of coastal protection in northern Gaul that would later be known as the Saxon Shore (*litus*

⁴⁴¹ Zosimus (I, 63, 2) explains the assassination rather unsatisfactorily by saying that Tacitus had made one of his relatives the governor of Syria and that this appointee allegedly "treated the local dignitaries very rudely"; Aurelius Victor (36, 2) and Eutropius (IX, 16) just say that Tacitus died, and the *Epitome* (36, 1) includes the embellishment that he died of a fever. The *HA* (*Tac.* 13, 5) presents both versions—Tacitus died either as a result of a conspiracy among his soldiers (*insidiis militaribus*) or because of illness (*morbo*).

⁴⁴² Our sources variously report that Florian reigned for 2 months and 20 days (Eutr. IX, 16), 60 days (*Epitome* 36, 2), "scarcely 2 months" (*HA, Tac.* 14, 2), and "1 or 2 months" (Aur. Vict. 37, 1).

⁴⁴³ *HA, Prob.* 13, 7 (*in nostra ripa, immo per omnes Gallias securi vagarentur*); cf. *HA, Tac.* 3, 4.

⁴⁴⁴ According to the *HA* (*Prob.* 13, 6), Probus reconquered 60 cities in Gaul from the barbarians; elsewhere (15, 3), inconsistency creeps in when he mentions 70 cities. These figures may seem exaggerated, but it is interesting to note that even the emperor Julian, in his *Caesares* (314 B), claimed that Probus "restored seventy cities". And Julianus must have known full well what he was talking about, as he himself engaged in exactly the same task while serving as *caesar* in Gaul. This number may, however, refer to the number of cities that Probus fortified in Gaul.

Saxonicum).⁴⁴⁵ The author of the *HA* even says that Probus mounted a counter-offensive, driving the barbarians “beyond the river Niger and beyond the Alba” (*ultra Nigrum fluvium et Albam*).⁴⁴⁶ If we take this to mean the river Neckar and the Swabian Jura mountain range,⁴⁴⁷ Probus’ army would have been deep in the *Agri Decumates*, which had been abandoned less than two decades before. Was Probus planning to recapture this region? Or was he merely making a pre-emptive strike? According to the *HA*, Probus intended to make “all of Germania a province”⁴⁴⁸; this is obviously an absurd notion, but the emperor could well have had more modest territorial gains in mind, especially in the wake of his highly successful campaign in Gaul. It is perhaps also possible that Probus and his army were simply traversing the *Agri Decumates*. On the one hand, this was an opportunity to intimidate the barbarian tribes there and discourage them from further attacks; on the other, such a route was a short-cut to Raetia, which was being threatened by the Vandals and Burgundians. Again, the chronology here is uncertain, but it looks like Probus killed some of these barbarians and took the rest captive in 278 at a battle on the Ligys (presumably present-day Lech, Bavaria) and in another subsequent clash; the captives were sent to Britain, where they were probably assigned to auxiliary troops.⁴⁴⁹ The emperor then wintered in the Middle Danube region, before waging war against the Isaurians in Asia Minor and the Blemmyes in Africa in 279. In 280, a certain Proculus and Bonosus⁴⁵⁰ rebelled against Probus at Cologne. Then, in 281, the emperor had to deal with a revolt by the governor of Syria, Saturninus.⁴⁵¹ All three of

⁴⁴⁵ According to Drinkwater (2008, 55).

⁴⁴⁶ *HA*, *Prob.* 13, 7.

⁴⁴⁷ These sites are identified by Crees (1911, 100); see also Magie’s translation *Historia Augusta, Volume III*, 364–365.

⁴⁴⁸ *HA*, *Prob.* 14, 5 (*si [...] fieret Germania tota provincia*).

⁴⁴⁹ *Zos.* I, 68. The Ligys is identified as the present-day Lech by Drinkwater (2007, 108).

⁴⁵⁰ *HA*, *Quadr. tyr.* 12–15; *Eutr.* IX, 17; *Epitome* 37, 2. Aurelius Victor (37, 3) mentions Bonosus alone, and, indeed, only Bonosus left coins; see Webb (1972b, 579). This is the year presented by Kienast (1996, 255); Drinkwater (2008, 55) places both revolts in 281.

⁴⁵¹ *Zos.* I, 66, 1. Cf. *HA*, *Quadr. tyr.* 9; *Aur. Vict.* 37, 3.

these usurpers were crushed in short order, allowing Probus to return to Rome to celebrate his triumph before 281 was out.⁴⁵²

Probus' successes against the barbarians are linked to another aspect characteristic of his reign: the resettling of depopulated provinces with groups of barbarians. This policy was nothing new, having been common practice since the time of Gallienus, but does not seem to have been pursued on such a massive scale before. Our main source is the *HA* and, while the numbers cited appear to be grossly inflated,⁴⁵³ the figure of 16,000 recruits from Germanic tribes for the Roman army does sound conceivable. Probus is said to have dispersed pockets of 50 or 60 of these barbarians among the existing Roman forces in various provinces.⁴⁵⁴ Surprisingly, this calculation tallies with the fact that the Roman army did actually have at least 250 auxiliary units (*auxilia*; see Appendix C). The *auxilia* were probably 500-man units and this form of recruitment would have been a simple way for Probus to top up their numbers. The same source tells us that Probus settled 100,000 Bastarnae in Thrace; he is also said to have resettled many Vandals, Gepids, and Greuthungi in Roman territory.⁴⁵⁵ Zosimus confirms the settlement of the Bastarnae in Thrace, but does not tell us how many of them there were.⁴⁵⁶ Is the *HA*'s figure at all plausible?

In point of fact, we need look no further than the early empire for precedents, as related by reliable sources. At the turn of the millennium, Sextus Aelius Catus relocated 50,000 Getae from beyond the Danube and settled them in Moesia.⁴⁵⁷ A further 40,000 Germanic captives were also deported to Gaul at this time.⁴⁵⁸ Around 64 CE, the Moesian *legatus pro praetore* Tiberius Plautius Silvanus Aelianus resettled more

⁴⁵² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 131.

⁴⁵³ For example, Probus is reported to have slaughtered "nearly 400,000" Germani, evidently during the reconquest of Gaul; see *HA, Prob.* 13, 7 (*caesis prope quadringentis milibus*).

⁴⁵⁴ *HA, Prob.* 14, 7; 15, 3. Drinkwater (2007, 160) concludes that they were Alamanni.

⁴⁵⁵ *HA, Prob.* 18, 1–2 (*centum milia Basternarum; [...] plerosque [...] ex Gipedis, Grauthungis et Vandulis*).

⁴⁵⁶ Zos. I, 71, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Strabo, *Geographica* VII, 3, 10.

⁴⁵⁸ Eutr. VII, 9 (*XL captivorum milia ex Germania transtulit et supra ripam Rheni in Gallia collocavit*).

than 100,000 unspecified Danubian barbarians on Roman soil.⁴⁵⁹ In 175 CE, the emperor Marcus Aurelius transferred 5,500 Sarmatian horsemen to Britain; he also seems to have settled many Marcomanni in Italy.⁴⁶⁰ Although Probus' relocation of the Bastarnae must have been a mammoth task, not all of them can have been resettled if they were still being fought by Diocletian, who then herded the rest of them into Roman territory. After that, the Bastarnae vanish from history on both sides of the Danube border.⁴⁶¹ All the other barbarians that Probus resettled within the empire presumably suffered the same fate: they succumbed to assimilation.

Among other measures taken, or at least planned, by Probus in the last years of his reign was his granting of permission for the inhabitants of Gaul, Pannonia, Moesia, and perhaps Hispania, to cultivate the vine.⁴⁶² This account is puzzling, inasmuch as these people clearly required no permission. True, Domitian, concerned about crop failures, once issued an edict prohibiting the establishment of new vineyards in Italy and ordering that vineyards in the provinces be removed or halved, but he never actually insisted on the implementation of this edict, and even later revoked it himself.⁴⁶³ We know of no other restrictions on wine production in the imperial period. The fact of the matter is that there were abundant vineyards in the West even in the early Principate, and large quantities of wine were exported from Gaul and Hispania as far afield as

⁴⁵⁹ ILS I, 986 (*legatus pro praetore Moesie, in qua plura quam centum milia ex numero Transdanuvianorum ad praestanda tributa cum coniugibus ac liberis et principibus aut regibus suis transduxit*).

⁴⁶⁰ Dio LXXII, 16; McLynn, *Marcus Aurelius*, 368; Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians*, 175–176. See HA, *M. Aur.* 22, 2 (*accepitque in deditionem Marcomannos plurimis in Italiam traductis*).

⁴⁶¹ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 12 (Diocletian's battles with the Bastarnae); Eutr. IX, 25 (transfer of the Bastarnae into Roman territory).

⁴⁶² Jerome (*Chron.* s. a. 280) speaks of the inhabitants of Gaul and Pannonia; Eutropius (IX, 17, 2) and Aurelius Victor (37, 2) add Moesia. Hispania is mentioned only by the HA (*Prob.* 18, 8) and Jordanes (*Rom.* 293). All these authors, with the exception of Victor, explicitly state that Probus "permitted" (*permisit*) this cultivation.

⁴⁶³ Suet. *Dom.* 7, 2 (*ad summam quondam ubertatem vini, frumenti vero inopiam, existimans nimio vinearum studio neglegi arva, edixit, ne quis in Italia novellaret, utque in provinciis vineta succiderentur, relicta ubi plurimum dimidia parte; nec exsequi rem perseveravit*); cf. Suet. *Dom.* 14, 2.

Italy.⁴⁶⁴ Probus' actions should evidently be read as an attempt to revive the economy (especially in areas hurt by barbarian invasions in previous decades) and perhaps also to spread the vineyards more evenly for easier distribution of wine. Sources also inform us that he deployed soldiers to set up vineyards, specifically in his home region around Sirmium, and also to build drainage canals and carry out other major projects. This suggests that his intention may have been to try to keep troops busy at a time when they would otherwise have nothing to do. Indeed, he might well have been lulled into believing that the empire was secure, its external and internal enemies had been crushed, and peace prevailed all around. Probus was even quoted as saying that soon there would be no need for an army.⁴⁶⁵ This may have been true for the time being, and it would certainly have been music to the ears of the empire's civilian population, but such a boast would not have gone down so well with the army and may have aroused resentment within its ranks. Some sources even imply that this—and the hard labour that Probus had forced on the soldiers—was one of the causes of his downfall.⁴⁶⁶ For when Probus planned an expedition to Persia in September or October 282 and marched his army eastward, he learned at Sirmium that his praetorian prefect, Carus, had declared himself emperor; not long afterwards, Probus was assassinated by his own soldiers.⁴⁶⁷

At this point, it is perhaps worth noting the speciousness of the contention that military emperors (i.e. emperors from an army background) controlled the empire in the second half of the third century. That claim is misleading to say the least, since Valerian and Gallienus were members of the aristocracy, as were Tacitus and Florian, and probably also Carus, Carinus, and Numerian. Only Claudius Gothicus, Quintillus, Aurelian (who between them reigned for seven years), Probus (six years),

⁴⁶⁴ Thurmond, *From Vines to Wines in Classical Rome*, 40–48.

⁴⁶⁵ *HA, Prob.* 20, 5 (*brevi, inquit, milites necessarios non habebimus*); *Eutr.* IX, 17 (*dixit brevi milites necessarios non futuros*); *Aur. Vict.* 37, 3 (*dixisse proditur brevi milites frustra fore*).

⁴⁶⁶ *HA (Prob.* 20, 2–3; 21, 2–3) and *Aurelius Victor* (37, 4) are quite candid about the fact that the revolt was provoked by the emperor's order for soldiers to dig drainage canals near his native Sirmium.

⁴⁶⁷ *Eutr.* IX, 17; *HA, Prob.* 20, 1; *Aur. Vict.* 37, 4; *Hieron. Chron.* s. a. 283; *Oros. Hist.* VII, 24, 3; *Jord. Rom.* 293. This is the dating provided by Kienast (1996, 253).

and, of course, Diocletian could really be categorised as “military emperors”. In other words, between 253 and 284 there were probably seven aristocratic emperors ruling for a total of 18 years and four military emperors ruling for an aggregate of 13 years. It should also be pointed out that none of the emperors ruling after Gallienus tried to overturn Gallienus’ reform of the army and provincial administration. Naturally, Claudius, Aurelian, and Probus were direct products of these reforms, so we could hardly expect them to attempt anything of the sort; but it is remarkable that senatorial emperors such as Tacitus or Carus (i.e. if Carus was actually a senator) did not.⁴⁶⁸

Carus came from southern Gaul, so in that respect he is not one of the Illyrian emperors either. When he became emperor in the autumn of 282, he immediately declared his two sons, the elder Carinus and the younger Numerian, to be his co-emperors, and both received the title of *caesar*.⁴⁶⁹ Carus proceeded with the Persian campaign that had already been planned by Probus (and evidently also by Aurelian). In 283, Carus, accompanied by Numerian, marched into Mesopotamia and captured Ctesiphon. He also took possession of Coche, better known as Seleucia. His elder son, Carinus, remained in the West and successfully fought the Sarmatians on the Danube. In the course of the Persian campaign, sometime in July or August 283, Carus died suddenly, with most sources reporting that he was struck by lightning.⁴⁷⁰ Curious and statistically improbable this cause of death may be, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Some scholars accept this information from our sources as fact⁴⁷¹; others are far from convinced and speculate that Carus was the victim of a conspiracy.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ This assumption rests solely on the testimony of the *HA, Car.* 5, 2–4.

⁴⁶⁹ *Eutr.* IX, 18. Neither of them was a minor: Carinus was about 32 years old, Numerian around 29 (Kienast, 1996, 260–261).

⁴⁷⁰ *HA, Car.* 8, 2–7; *Eutr.* IX, 18; *Aur. Vict.* 38, 3; *Epitome* 38, 3.

⁴⁷¹ Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 51; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 38–39.

⁴⁷² Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 279; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 133; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 33–34; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 39.

Numerian, now *augustus*, brokered a peace with the Persians⁴⁷³ and then decided to return to Rome. Wracked by pain from an eye inflammation, he travelled in an enclosed litter. Our sources agree that he was assassinated along the way by his father-in-law Aper, the praetorian prefect.⁴⁷⁴ Although Aper tried to hide the murder from the soldiers, managing for a time to assure them that the emperor was simply protecting his diseased eyes from the sun and wind, his deed was eventually betrayed by the stench of the decomposing corpse at Nicomedia on 20 November 284. Obviously, the soldiers were outraged and detained the prefect. A military assembly was called and was addressed by a certain Diocles, commander of Numerian's bodyguard (the *protectores domestici*). Having evidently secured the support of the army's commanders before the troops were convened, he could then depend on the acclamation of the soldiers. This would smooth the assembly's unanimous approval of him as the new *augustus*. His very position makes one wonder whether he was directly involved in Numerian's assassination, or at least knew about it.⁴⁷⁵ Diocles, doubtless aware that this might indeed invite speculation, swore an oath at the assembly denying any knowledge of, or involvement in, the death of Numerian. Immediately after his speech, he himself stabbed Aper. In doing so, he probably averted suspicion, impressed the soldiers with his assertiveness, and assumed the role of avenger of the legitimate emperor (while perhaps disposing of an inconvenient witness into the bargain), but of course he could not become the legitimate emperor himself, for Carinus remained *augustus*. Yet Carinus was far away in the West, and the great army returning from the successful Eastern campaign needed a leader here and now. Worse for Carinus, if our sources are to be believed, he had a particularly unsavoury reputation. The army commanders in the East were apparently persuaded that Diocles would be a much better emperor. Then there was the fact that, after the death of

⁴⁷³ This peace worked to the advantage of the Romans because they regained Mesopotamia, which had previously been lost to Shapur I; see Frye (2006, 128). Southern (2004, 143) concludes that a peace was made, but no treaty was reached; Leadbetter (2009, 88) argues that there was no peace.

⁴⁷⁴ *HA, Car.* 12, 1–2; *Eutr.* IX, 18; *Aur. Vict.* 38, 6; *Epitome* 38, 4.

⁴⁷⁵ Bowman, "Diocletian and the first tetrarchy", 69; Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 134; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 40. Kolb (1987, 12–15), on the other hand, makes the case that neither Diocletian nor Aper had anything to do with the deaths of either Numerian or Carus. For one thing, if Aper (or Diocletian) had been involved in the death of Carus, why would he have let Numerian live for another year?

either Carus or Numerian, one Marcus Aurelius Sabinus Julianus had risen up against Carinus in the West. Carinus quashed that revolt (probably in 285 rather than 284),⁴⁷⁶ which meant that Diocles, the new emperor in the East, would now have to remove Carinus himself.

The new emperor—still a usurper for the time being, despite his best efforts—was from Dalmatia, where he was born perhaps around 245, possibly near the town of Salona (present-day Solin, Croatia), not far from where Split now is.⁴⁷⁷ Our sources say that he was the son of a scribe, or even the freedman of a senator named Anullinus.⁴⁷⁸ We know nothing further about his life before 284 and it would be pointless to speculate.⁴⁷⁹ Soon after his election, he changed his name to Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus (and is known to us as Diocletian). In the spring of 285,⁴⁸⁰ a momentous battle was fought between Diocletian and Carinus near the confluence of the Margus (the present-day Great Morava, Serbia) and the Danube. Carinus had the larger army and initially put Diocletian on the back foot, but, as the battle wore on, Carinus' praetorian prefect Aristobulus switched sides and the despised Carinus was killed by his own soldiers.⁴⁸¹ Now that Diocletian had incorporated Carinus' army into his

⁴⁷⁶ Kienast (1996, 263) distinguishes two different usurpers by the name of Julianus who led uprisings in 283 or 284, but acknowledges that they may have been one and the same person; Southern (2004, 134–135) is of the same opinion. Cf. *PLRE I*, 474 and 480. For a discussion on the circumstances of Diocletian's accession in general, see Leadbetter (2009, 40), Potter (2004, 280), Williams (2000, 36).

⁴⁷⁷ For more on the problem of determining the year of Diocletian's death (and thus the year of his birth), see the following chapter and Appendix E.

⁴⁷⁸ See Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 286 (*scribae filius*); *Epitome* 39, 1 (*Anulini senatoris libertinus*). Eutropius (IX, 19) gives both versions, but seems to attach more weight to the former (*virum obscurissime natum, adeo ut a plerisque scribae filius, a nonnullis Anulini senatoris libertinus fuisse credatur*). As Kuhoff (2001, 21) rightly points out, these versions are not mutually exclusive, and in fact Diocletian may have been both. Zonaras (XII, 31) presents only the second version and says that Diocletian, though a common soldier, rose to become *dux Moesiae* on merit.

⁴⁷⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 280. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the hypothesis put forward, for example, by *PLRE I* (79) that this senator Anullinus was the father of the Anullinus who was consul in 295 and twice an urban prefect of Rome.

⁴⁸⁰ This is the dating used by Barnes (1982, 50), Potter (2004, 280), Williams (2000, 38). Kienast (1996, 261) says August or September.

⁴⁸¹ And he was rewarded accordingly: not only did Diocletian confirm him as praetorian prefect and consul for 285, but Aristobulus was also later appointed to the important posts

own and headed for Italy, he could consider himself ruler of the entire empire.

Soon afterwards, probably on 21 July 285 in Milan, Diocletian enlisted an old friend of his, the experienced officer Marcus Aurelius Maximianus (Maximian). He, too, was from Illyricum, was of perhaps even lower birth and probably shared at least part of his military career with Diocletian.⁴⁸² Maximian was given the title of *caesar*, just as Carinus and Numerian had been three years earlier by Carus, so he remained subordinate to Diocletian both in fact and in form.⁴⁸³ Diocletian's power-sharing decision was highly unusual—a co-rule was not unknown, but usually involved a member of the dynasty.⁴⁸⁴ Diocletian, however, had no son and evidently no other male relative on whom he could rely.⁴⁸⁵ The delegation of power in some form or other, however, clearly seemed inevitable

of *proconsul Africae* (290–294) and *praefectus urbis Romae* (295–296). See *PLRE I*, 106, Aristobulus.

⁴⁸² This is the date of Maximian's elevation reached by Barnes (1981, 6). Bowman (2008, 67), is less certain ("perhaps on 21 July 285"). Potter (2004, 280–281) concludes that it was 25 July; Kolb (1987, 23–28) suggests it was as late as December 285. According to the *Epitome* (40, 10), Maximian was born near Sirmium (present-day Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia) and his parents were day labourers (*parentes eius exercebant opera mercenaria*), but note that Barnes (1982, 32), translates this as "shopkeepers" and quite reasonably concludes that Maximian was present with Diocletian on Carus' Eastern campaign and witnessed Diocletian's usurpation. As to the year of his birth, only the *Epitome* (40, 11) yields any clue, saying that Maximian died "in his sixties", but not necessarily as a 60-year-old (*aetate interiit sexagenarius*). This would imply a birth year around 250.

⁴⁸³ This is also borne out by Maximian's cognomen *Herculius*, which he probably acquired in 286, while Diocletian adopted the higher name *Jovius* (for a discussion on the year, see Nixon & Rodgers 2015, 48–51; cf. Bowman, 2008, 70). Maximian also altered his name slightly (to Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus), and may have become Diocletian's adopted son (*filius Augusti*), as suggested by Williams (2000, 45), but Southern (2004, 136) disputes this. Barnes (1981, 11–12) suggests reading this kinship figuratively, solely through their personal deities, Jupiter and Hercules. On the interrelationships between the tetrarchs, see the following chapter.

⁴⁸⁴ Marcus Aurelius (161–180) chose as a co-ruler Lucius Verus and later his own son Commodus; during the third century, the emperors Septimius Severus (193–211), Macrinus (217–218), Maximinus Thrax (235–238), Philip (244–249), Decius (249–251), Trebonianus Gallus (251–253), and Valerian (253–260) elevated their sons to co-ruler. For that matter, very shortly before the accession of Diocletian, the emperor Carus (282–283) had also made his two sons co-rulers.

⁴⁸⁵ Or at least no male relative whom he could entrust with co-rule. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 41) says that, in about 311, Diocletian had an influential relative in the army

to him: the empire was simply too large and its problems too many. Diocletian must also have been acutely aware that he was just one of many ambitious generals in the empire. For the time being, he had their support, but any one of them could replace him, as had proved to be the case all too often during the third century.⁴⁸⁶ After all, Diocletian himself came to power in dramatic circumstances and as a typical 3rd-century military usurper. He could ill afford to fail; on the contrary, he needed to succeed no matter what, in all haste, and in several places in the empire at once: in 285, the peace was being threatened in Gaul by the bagaudae, and along the Danube frontier by the Sarmatians. Diocletian was needed everywhere.

The bagaudae had been peasants and shepherds, but, taking a page out of the book of the Germani invading Gaul at this time, they abandoned their fields and pastures and began to make a living by looting and pillaging. Their rise, consequent upon the crisis of Roman rule in Gaul during the “Gallic Empire”, was fuelled by the mistakes the state inflicted on its subjects, as even the panegyrics suggest.⁴⁸⁷ Eutropius and Aurelius Victor oblige us with the names of two of these rebels’ leaders, Amandus and Aelianus, but then omit the fact that the first of them struck coins on which he styled himself *Imperator Caesar Gaius Amandus Pius Felix Augustus*, which was a classic imperial title.⁴⁸⁸ This would have rather upset the efforts of anyone trying to convey the impression of a peasant uprising. Anyhow, Maximian was hastily dispatched to Gaul, while Diocletian himself took charge of the Danubian frontier. Maximian clearly did a good job—he easily put down the rebels without going overboard, and

(*cognatum suum quendam, militarem ac potentem virum*). Of course, it is also possible that this unnamed officer was simply too young in 285.

⁴⁸⁶ Williams (2000, 43) believes that Diocletian’s decision to share his rule was bold, yet rational, as does Southern (2004, 136). Mitchell (2015, 58) postulates that “the burdens of warfare were without question the main reason why Diocletian created the imperial college to aid him in his ruler’s task”.

⁴⁸⁷ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 4, 3 (*cum militaris habitus ignari agricolae appetiverunt, cum arator peditem, cum pastor equitem, cum hostem barbarum suorum cultorum rusticus vastator imitatus est?*). Cf. Eutr. IX, 20; Aur. Vict. 39, 17. For a startling admission of the government’s past wrongs against its subjects, see *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 5, 3 (*non dico exacerbatas saeculi prioris iniuriis per clementiam vestram ad obsequium redisse provincias*); *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 8, 3 (*Gallias priorum temporum iniuriis efferatas rei publicae ad obsequium reddidit, sibi ipsas ad salutem*). Van Dam (1985, 25–33) discusses this.

⁴⁸⁸ Webb, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume V, Part II*, 595.

we do not hear of the bagaudae again until the early fifth century.⁴⁸⁹ He was equally successful in dealing with the Germani who were also ravaging Gaul at the time. He appears to have accomplished both missions in 285.⁴⁹⁰

While Maximian was getting the better of the rebels and Germani in Gaul, Diocletian fought off the Sarmatians⁴⁹¹ on the Danube and then headed east to confront Rome's most formidable adversary: Persia. Diocletian would move his court around the Eastern part of the empire at various times over the next 10 years, even making several trips to the West, but essentially his main residences would be the cities of Sirmium and Nicomedia. As for the Persians, the last time the Romans clashed with them—and successfully so—was during the reign of Carus. Diocletian did not fight the Persians; there was probably no need, as the threat of force alone would have been enough. He likely began his diplomatic negotiations in 286 and ended them in 287.⁴⁹² King Bahram II (274–293), faced with internal issues in his own empire, agreed to a boundary change favourable to the Romans, but we do not know exactly how this borderline was demarcated.⁴⁹³ Diocletian also allegedly installed the Arsacian prince Tiridates III, who is said to have spent his life from 252 or

⁴⁸⁹ Eutropius (IX, 20, 3) mentions how Maximian progressed with ease (*levibus proeliis*); for panegyrics on his restraint, see *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 5, 3, and *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 8, 3.

⁴⁹⁰ This is the year put forward by Barnes (1982, 57). On the Germanic invasion, see *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 5. According to this account, the Germani comprised Alamanni and Burgundians, along with Heruli and Chaibones, who had come all the way from the heart of Germania (*viribus primi barbarorum, locis ultimi*). The only ever mention we have of the Chaibones is here and in *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 7, 2. The hordes of Alamanni and Burgundians were so large that Maximian resorted to the tactic of starvation; the Heruli and Chaibones, on the other hand, he annihilated.

⁴⁹¹ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 6; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 50.

⁴⁹² Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 89; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 143.

⁴⁹³ According to Barnes (1981, 6), the Persian king ceded the areas west and south of the Tigris to Diocletian and renounced his claim to Armenia. However, the sources are not clear on this, e.g. *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 7, 5 (*Diocletiano sponte se dederunt regna Persarum*). On the other hand, they do show that the king sent gifts to Diocletian (*Pan. Lat.* X [2], 9, 2; *Pan. Lat.* XI [3], 5, 4) and that he made every effort to ingratiate himself with the emperor (*Pan. Lat.* X [2], 10, 6). There are also hints of the Persians' inferior status, probably as a result of Diocletian's success in 287; see *Pan. Lat.* VIII (5), 3, 3.

253 in Roman territory as ruler of part of Armenia, although this interpretation is disputed.⁴⁹⁴ Our sources speak of a diplomatic triumph, with Diocletian styling himself *Persicus maximus* for this achievement. This arrangement in the East did not then change until the reign of King Narseh (293–302).

Now that Diocletian's Western co-ruler had proved himself, Maximian was elevated to *augustus* on 1 April 286, and thus formally became Diocletian's equal.⁴⁹⁵ Potter makes the interesting observation that there is no way Diocletian and Maximian could have been in the same place on that date.⁴⁹⁶ Diocletian was far away in the East, perhaps in Byzantium or on his way to Palestine; Maximian was probably in Trier or Mainz.⁴⁹⁷ Having parted in the summer of 285, they did not meet up again until 288.⁴⁹⁸ This means that Diocletian trusted his co-ruler implicitly. And he was right about his comrade-in-arms: Maximian indeed remained personally loyal to Diocletian throughout his life.

Not long after his elevation, Maximian was confronted with another problem in the West. General Carausius, who had assisted Maximian in the fight against the bagaudae and had also ably commanded the defence of the north Gaulish coast against Saxon and Frankish pirates, declared himself emperor in the autumn of 286.⁴⁹⁹ Taking control of both the coast of northern Gaul and Roman Britain, he made Bononia (also Gesoriacum; present-day Boulogne-sur-Mer, France) his seat. Our sources explain his motives: once he had purged the sea of pirates and seized their booty, Maximian heard accusations that he kept the booty for

⁴⁹⁴ This is how it is seen by the likes of Barnes (1981, 6) and Potter (2004, 292). For a different perspective on the succession to the Armenian throne, see Chapter 9.

⁴⁹⁵ This is the date given by Barnes (1982, 4) and Potter (2004, 282); it is also favoured by Southern (2004, 141–142). Williams (2000, 48) mentions only April 286; according to Leadbetter (2009, 54), it was “probably in April”. Bowman (2008, 67) cannot decide between 1 March and 1 April.

⁴⁹⁶ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 282.

⁴⁹⁷ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 50–51 and 56–57.

⁴⁹⁸ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 266.

⁴⁹⁹ This is the dating used by Barnes (1981, 7), Williams (2000, 47), and Casey (2005, 33). Drinkwater (2007, 182) also allows for the winter of 286/7. Odahl (2013, 45) dates Carausius' usurpation to as early as 286 in order to argue that Maximian's elevation was a reaction to Carausius' usurpation. However, it cannot be stated with certainty (nor is it likely) that Diocletian would not have appointed a co-ruler had Carausius' usurpation not occurred.

himself and even let pirates plunder the coast so that he could confiscate their ill-gotten gains immediately after. Maximian ordered his execution. In response, Carausius took possession of the fleet, fled to Britain, and secured control of this province.⁵⁰⁰ Many in Britain and northern Gaul may actually have seen Carausius as a man capable of providing them with peace and stability. Carausius initially hoped that Diocletian and Maximian would recognise his claim; he cast himself as their legitimate colleague, as his coins depicting all three emperors suggest. When he realised that he could expect nothing of the sort, he began to mint coins bearing only his own portrait.⁵⁰¹

Yet Maximian was prevented from striking against Carausius immediately. On 1 January 287, just as a ceremony was taking place at Maximian's seat (probably in Trier and certainly near the Rhine) to mark the fact that Maximian was taking his first consulship that day, the Germani (probably the Franks) launched an attack.⁵⁰² According to a panegyrist, Maximian took up arms himself and led his soldiers in a successful counter-attack. He returned victorious the same day. Even so, the suppression of the Germanic threat required his presence on the Rhine and two years of persistent and systematic efforts (287–288).⁵⁰³ During this campaign, Maximian even penetrated into the Germanic interior. While this invasion did not yield territorial gains, at least not lasting ones, and undoubtedly secured little in the way of spoils, it must have had at least a powerful impact on both the morale of the Roman army and the people of Gaul after decades of Germanic incursions into the province. The chronology of the events during Maximian's campaign is uncertain, but the strike in question seems to have been directed against the Franks and to have taken place in 287.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Eutr. IX 21; Aur. Vict. 39, 21; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 3.

⁵⁰¹ Coins with the likeness of all three rulers bore the legend “Carausius and his brothers” (*Carausius et fratres sui*).

⁵⁰² Barnes (1982, 57) says it could also have been in Mainz or Cologne. Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 64), Drinkwater (2007, 181), and Southern (2004, 142) are sure that it was Trier. The problem, of course, is the vagueness of our only source, *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 6.

⁵⁰³ Kuhoff, *Diocletian und die Epoche der Tetrarchie*, 77nn; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 142; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 283; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 50–51.

⁵⁰⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 283; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 142–143. The source is *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 7.

The panegyric from 289 sums up Maximian's achievements at this time in the following words: "So many kings, O Emperor, have become your vassals [*clientes*]! Through you and from you and facing you, Gennoboudes has recovered his kingdom! For what else did he seek of you by coming to you with all his people but to rule at last with sovereign power, having reconciled with you, Maximian? I have heard that he repeatedly showed you to his people and bade them look long upon you and learn submissiveness, for he himself became your servant".⁵⁰⁵ The panegyric of 291 seems to allude to the same event when it says that "Franks, led by their king, came to sue for peace" (*Franco ad petendum pacem cum rege venientes*).⁵⁰⁶ Regardless of whether Gennoboudes was defeated in this campaign, or whether he was merely compelled by circumstances to seek peace, Maximian evidently confirmed his authority, and the king became a vassal of the Romans.

In 288, Diocletian and Maximian carried out a joint strike against the Alamanni. Maximian advanced from the Rhine, probably from Mainz, towards the south-east, while Diocletian moved in from Raetia, probably Augsburg (*Augusta Vindelicorum*), in the east and headed towards the north-west, (*ingressus est nuper illam quae Raetiae est obiecta Germaniam*).⁵⁰⁷ The panegyric of 297 tells us that "the king of the most savage of tribes was taken captive thanks to the snares he himself had set, and from the Rhine bridge to the Danube crossing at Guntia, Alamannia was torched and razed to the ground".⁵⁰⁸ Guntia is present-day Günzburg (Bavaria), and if the bridge at Mainz is meant here, the theatre of the joint campaign of Diocletian and Maximian covered almost the whole of the former *Agri Decumates*, lost in the 260 s.⁵⁰⁹ During this campaign, Diocletian and Maximian convened⁵¹⁰ and apparently consulted each other on what course of action to take against the Germani and, while

⁵⁰⁵ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 10, 3.

⁵⁰⁶ *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 5, 4.

⁵⁰⁷ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 9, 1. Regarding the dating, see Williams (2000, 50), Barnes (1982, 51 and 57), and Southern (2004, 143).

⁵⁰⁸ *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 2, 1 (*captus scilicet rex ferocissimae nationis inter ipsas quas moliebatur insidias et a ponte Rheni usque ad Danubii transitum Guntiansem deusta atque exhausta penitus Alamannia*).

⁵⁰⁹ See Drinkwater (2007, 181).

⁵¹⁰ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 9, 1 (*ex diversa orbis parte coeuntes invictas dexteris contulistis, adeo fidum illud fuit fraternumque colloquium*).

they were at it, Carausius. Again, it is difficult to assess the impact of these operations, but for the foreseeable future, at least, they secured the Roman frontier on the Rhine and Upper Danube. In any event, in 289 the author of a panegyric recited in Maximian's honour declared that, even were the Rhine to dry up, there was no need to fear danger from there, since all that he saw beyond it belonged to Rome.⁵¹¹ However, it is contentious how much Diocletian and Maximian intended to conquer the territory of the former *Agri Decumates*.

Finally, having secured the Rhine frontier, Maximian could turn his attention to Carausius. Once again, the chronology is unclear, but he seems to have mounted his first offensive in 288, when he successfully seized Carausius' territory in Gaul, most significantly Bononia, and in doing so confined his empire to Britain.⁵¹² He then built up a fleet to attack Britain directly, but en route he lost his ships in either a battle or bad weather (probably in 289).⁵¹³ Carausius grabbed this opportunity to reoccupy certain parts of the Gallic coast, prompting Diocletian to head west quickly to support his colleague, this time not militarily, but politically. At the turn of 291,⁵¹⁴ a meeting was held in Milan, at which Diocletian did everything he could to publicly support his co-ruler and thus his own government. Even this solid dyarchy, as the two emperors' joint rule between 285 and 293 is sometimes called, could not long survive a string of setbacks as bad as the fiasco of the operation against Carausius. The time may now have come to think about a new division of responsibilities and the expansion of the imperial college. Although the next two emperors would not be appointed until 293, one of the topics that Diocletian and Maximian are likely to have addressed

⁵¹¹ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 7, 7 (*licet Rhenus arescat tenuique lapsu vix leves calculos perspicuo vado pellat, nullus inde metus est: quidquid ultra Rhenum prospicio, Romanum est*).

⁵¹² Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 284.

⁵¹³ Kienast (1996, 272) and Odahl (2013, 46) say this mission was in 289, Potter (2004, 284) the spring of 290. They diverge because *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 12, mentions, in April 289, that the preparations for the invasion of Britain have taken almost a whole year (*toto fere anno*) and are now over, as the ships are ready. However, *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), the panegyric of 291, makes no mention of any success. The panegyric to Constantius from 297 only suggests that Maximian's fleet was destroyed by a storm, but this may be a device to cover up the fact that he had been defeated (*Pan. Lat.* VIII [4], 12, 2).

⁵¹⁴ According to Kienast (1996, 272) and Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 67). Barnes (1982, 52 and 58) allows for either December 290 or January 291.

in Milan was the suitability of various candidates and the timing of their acclamation.⁵¹⁵

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⁵¹⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 286.

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The First Tetrarchy (293–305 CE)

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF A NEW POLITICAL SYSTEM

A fair few people could tell you that “tetrarchy” is of Greek origin and means “rule of four”. Not quite so many know that the word was in use long before Diocletian’s time. Fewer still are privy to the fact that Diocletian and his colleagues did not call themselves “tetrarchs” at all. It could even be argued that they would have been offended had anyone called them a tetrarch, as this was a term reserved for the subordinate rulers of Rome in the East at the turn of the Common Era.¹ Their titles were clearly dictated by tradition: *imperator* and *augustus* designated a senior emperor, *caesar* a junior emperor.² Modern historiography employs the term “tetrarchy” not only for the sake of simplicity, but also to place a

¹ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 145. The term “tetrarch” was, for example, the official title of Herod the Great and his successors who had ruled the small vassal states in Judea at the turn of the millennium. In contrast, the term “tetrarchy” used as a name for the system created by Diocletian does not appear for the first time until the late nineteenth century (it is first used by Hermann Schiller, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit, Band II*, Gotha, 1887, p. 119) and took a while to catch on among historians (for a summary, see Leadbetter, 2009, pp. 3–5).

² Technically, the title of *imperator* belonged only to the two *augusti* at the time of the tetrarchy, as is evident from surviving inscriptions from 301 to 306 (see Barnes, 1982,

stress on the administrative—rather than political—division of the Roman Empire into four parts. The first tetrarchy began precisely on 1 March 293, when Constantius and Galerius were added to the existing two emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, as co-rulers, thus creating a system of two senior (*augusti*) and two junior (*caesares*) emperors.

It is disputed when the tetrarchic system as such ended. The name “second tetrarchy” is usually applied to the brief period between the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian and the death of Constantius I (1 May 305–25 July 306). Starting with the usurpations by Constantine and Maxentius in late 306, the tetrarchic system began to collapse, and we could question how much sense it makes to refer to emperors ruling in different parts of the empire in the following years as tetrarchs (because, if nothing else, there were not always four of them). And yet we find the term “third tetrarchy” sometimes used for the period 306–308, and even the “fourth tetrarchy” for the years 308–310.³ As far as Simon Corcoran is concerned, “the tetrarchy proper, of two Augusti and two Caesars, only functioned from 293 to 306 and ceased entirely once all the rulers held the full rank of Augustus by 310”.⁴ However, it could be argued that the idea of tetrarchy had been dealt a fatal blow as early as the usurpation of imperial power in 306 by Constantine and Maxentius, as the two “princes” entertained ambitions on a scale not foreseen by the tetrarchic system.

Scholars debate whether the tetrarchy was masterminded by Diocletian from the ground up, or whether it actually evolved spontaneously and was the product of many factors, of which Diocletian’s idea was just one. Nor can we be sure whether Diocletian had always had a plan on how to deal with the problem of succession. As we know, both *caesares* were promoted to *augusti* in 305 to fill the void left by their former superiors’ political retirement. Had this eventuality been anticipated by Diocletian

pp. 17–29); the junior emperors, alongside their official and victory titles, were usually referred to only as *nobilissimi caesares*.

³ See, for example, Corcoran (2012, p. 4), and Kienast (1996, p. 264), but contrast that with Barnes (1982, pp. 4–5), who accepts no more than the first and second tetrarchy, and even then feels compelled to use quotation marks.

⁴ Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs*, 1.

back in 293:⁵ And just when did he come up with his plan for voluntary abdication? Clearly, here at least, Diocletian must have been making preparations several years in advance: although we do not know when work started on the construction of his “retirement” palace in present-day Split, it was evidently intended as a place of rest and relaxation for a private citizen, not an emperor.⁶

The initial division of power between Diocletian and Maximian in 285, the causes of which have already been discussed here, was unquestionably revolutionary in that it paid no heed to blood kinship (unlike the practice established under the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties), and very probably also disdained “institutionalised adoption” (on which the second-century “adoptive emperors” of the Antonine dynasty had relied so heavily).⁷ As Stephen Mitchell points out, Diocletian’s “main objective was to achieve a manageable division of imperial powers, and it led to an unofficial territorial division of the empire”.⁸ The very same could be said of the emergence of the tetrarchy *per se* in 293. It is best summed up by Warren Treadgold: “to give each weak point in the frontier a capable commander who would not proclaim himself emperor, by 293 Diocletian chose three trusted generals and proclaimed them emperors himself”.⁹ Considerations of security and political stability plainly played

⁵ Southern (2004, p. 136), although allowing for both possibilities, leans towards the latter (“He proceeded very cautiously, just possibly working to a far-sighted preconceived plan, but more likely feeling his way forward little by little as circumstances dictated, steadily building upon a precedent”). Leadbetter (2009, p. 54) and Bowman (2008a, p. 70) make similar points. Corcoran (2012, p. 5), on the other hand, believes that Diocletian always had a far-reaching plan for the periodic rotation of emperors (“It was presumably intended from the start that each Augustus would in due course be succeeded by his Caesar, with a new Caesar appointed in his place.”). He is backed up directly by Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 18, 5), one of our main sources.

⁶ Nixon and Rodgers (2015, p. 189) say that “It is impossible to date precisely the commencement or completion of the building of the palace at Split, but it is difficult to imagine that construction had not started well before 305; Diocletian did not plan to run the Empire from the Dalmatian coast”.

⁷ Adoption was rife in Roman culture, and even back in republican times it carried weight in politics (Scipio the Younger and Octavian are prime examples), but it was the emperors of the Nerva–Antonine dynasty, starting with Nerva (96–98), who turned this into a policy central to the way they handled matters of succession. It is uncertain, however, whether Maximian became Diocletian’s “son” (see note 483 of Chapter 3).

⁸ Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 59.

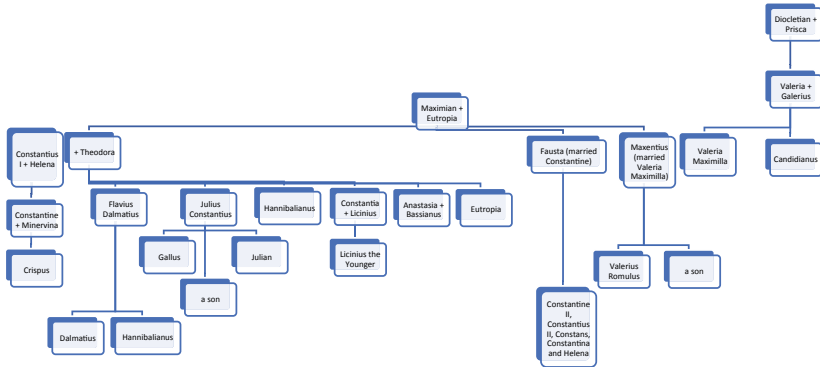
⁹ Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 9.

an important role in Diocletian's thinking: after 285, it was unlikely that any usurper would triumph over legitimate emperors; after 293, it was all but impossible.

This division of the empire was not political, but purely administrative, a distinction that is obviously very important. Political division had always spelt disaster for the empire as a whole, and the Palmyrene Empire and the "Gallic Empire" would still have been fresh in the minds of Diocletian and all his colleagues. Diocletian was actually determined to keep the empire united politically, protected from the enemy both without and within. While his choice of co-rulers was intended to ease his own daunting task of protecting, administering, and reforming a Roman Empire that had only just begun to recover from the crisis of the third century, it was also designed to prevent usurpation, instability, and chaos. Indeed, these efforts coloured absolutely everything Diocletian did during his 20-year reign.

The new system that Diocletian gradually crafted was not entirely contrary to the two aforementioned political systems that had previously ensured the continuity of imperial power: adoption, marriage, and even blood kinship still had a role to play in the tetrarchy as well, as we shall see later. Yet, at its core the tetrarchy was—or certainly should have been—a meritocracy, a system that placed a premium on merit, personal qualities, and loyalty. Diocletian, as the architect of the whole system, undoubtedly retained control over it throughout the duration of the first tetrarchy. Therein lay its strength, but also its weakness. The tetrarchy did not long outlive its creator and can be said to have failed; indeed, it was arguably doomed to run aground.¹⁰ In our evaluation of this system, what matters is the yardstick by which we measure success. For Aurelian, who ruled for 5 years and managed to unite the empire politically for the first time in ages, to have stayed in power for 15 years would have been a fantastic achievement. Gallienus, who did rule for 15 years, would surely have considered it a great access had he ruled the whole empire. Then there is Diocletian, who did rule the whole empire—with a firm

¹⁰ See, for example, Southern (2004, p. 148) ("The Tetrarchy was an anomaly [...] ultimately, it was a failure"); Kolb (1997, p. 45) ("Die Tetrarchie als Regierungssystem war folglich ein kurzfristiges Experiment auf hohem organisatorischen und ideologischen Niveau, aber insbesondere von ihren moralischen Voraussetzungen her, welche auf der völligen Loyalität und Disziplin des Herrscherkollegiums beruhten, zu anspruchsvoll. Daher musste sie scheitern").



Genealogical Chart 4.1 Genealogy of Constantine’s line together with the “extended tetrarchic family”

hand—for 20 years. In that time, he defeated all external and internal enemies, ceded no territory (on the contrary, he actually gained a little in the East), reorganised the empire’s political, administrative, monetary, fiscal, and legal systems, ensured its future economic, social, and military stability by making the necessary reforms, and introduced the unheard-of notion of planned abdication. Even with the benefit of hindsight, we would have been unable to advise Diocletian on how better to maintain the system of tetrarchy he had created or how better to secure the empire politically in the future.¹¹

¹¹ Had we the opportunity to talk to Diocletian, there is one piece of advice we might have given him: don’t abdicate. It could be speculated that, if the system of two *augusti* and two *caesares* had been allowed to work without all the chopping and changing, so that each tetrarch ruled until his death, the whole system would probably have been rather more stable and the tetrarchy would have lasted longer. Thus, after the death of Constantius in 306, Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius would have simply chosen a new Western *caesar* as his replacement. In any case, there would have been less political opportunity for the shocks to the tetrarchic system discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

THE FIRST TETRARCHY (293–305 CE): THE EMPERORS AND RELATIONS BETWEEN THEM, THEIR TRAVELS, AND THEIR CITIES OF RESIDENCE

As we have already noted, Constantius and Galerius became *caesares* on 1 March 293. Constantius was elevated in Milan on the authority of the Western *augustus* Maximian, while Galerius was elevated personally by Diocletian, probably in Sirmium.¹² Constantius was senior in rank to his colleague Galerius, even though they were appointed *caesar* on the same day. The difference lay in their age: Constantius was older than Galerius (by some 15 years, according to Leadbetter).¹³ This is why his name is always given before Galerius in official documents. Each of the two new *caesares* was in a subordinate position to his elder *augustus* in terms not only of the power hierarchy, but also kinship, since each was the son-in-law of his *augustus*—Galerius was given Diocletian’s daughter Valeria as his wife, and Constantius married Maximian’s daughter Theodora.

Some sources refer to Theodora as Maximian’s stepdaughter (*privigna*).¹⁴ In that case, she may have been his wife Eutropia’s daughter from an earlier marriage. But who was Eutropia’s previous husband? One of Theodora’s sons was named Hannibalianus, leading some to speculate that Eutropia’s husband had been the praetorian prefect Afranius Hannibalianus (with whom we shall become more acquainted below), while others consider Theodora more likely to have been Maximian’s

¹² Hydatius (*Cons. Const.* s. a. 291) tells us that both Constantius and Galerius became *caesares* on 1 March. Cf. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 35, 4), who explicitly says that Galerius’ 20th anniversary celebrations were to fall on 1 March 312. On the shared date of elevation of Constantius and Galerius, see Southern (2004, p. 146), Barnes (1981, p. 8), Barnes (1982, p. 4), Pohlsander (2004, p. 8), Corcoran (2007, p. 41). Odahl (2013, p. 46) has no doubt that it was Sirmium; Leadbetter (2009, 63) is sure it was Nicomedia. Some believe that Galerius was elevated after Constantius, either several weeks (Potter, 2013, p. 40) or even months (Kuhoff, 2001, p. 125; Kienast, 1996, p. 283) later in the same year. Barnes (1982, p. 62) persuasively rejects this hypothesis.

¹³ Leadbetter (2009, p. 64) writes that “Constantius was senior by the simple reason of his age. He may have been as much as fifteen years older than Galerius and his attested career includes provincial governorships. Nothing of that sort is known of Galerius”. For a discussion on Galerius’ age, see below; for more on the year of Constantius’ birth, see Chapter 5.

¹⁴ Aur. Vict. 39, 25; Eutr. IX, 22; *Epitome* 39, 2; 40, 12. Other sources refer to her only as a daughter: *Origo* 2; Philostorgius *HE* II, 16.

own daughter, born to him from his previous marriage to Hannibalianus' daughter.¹⁵

Naturally, Galerius and Constantius had to divorce their previous wives before marrying the daughters of their respective *augusti*.¹⁶ However, no formal annulment of the marriage may have been necessary. As we shall see in the next chapter, Constantius and Helena were very probably joined only in a common-law marriage. Despite perhaps never becoming Constantius' legally recognised wife, Helena bore him a son, Constantine, evidently in 272 (see the next chapter for a discussion on the problem of the year of Constantine's birth). This would suggest that Constantius already had a 21-year-old heir when he was proclaimed *caesar*. We have no idea who Galerius was previously married to, if at all. What we do know is that he had two children, Candidianus and Valeria Maximilla. Lactantius describes Candidianus as Galerius' illegitimate son, even though he was not born until 295 or 296¹⁷; indeed, he was born to him by a concubine, apparently with the consent of Valeria, who was herself barren and subsequently adopted Candidianus.¹⁸ Valeria Maximilla was married to Maxentius, Maximian's son, sometime before 304,¹⁹ so she must have been much older than Candidianus—by 10–15 years—and it is very likely that she, too, was Galerius' daughter by a previous marriage or concubinage.²⁰

¹⁵ There is no consensus on this matter. Lenski (2007, p. 59), Claus (1996, p. 18), Potter (2013, p. 33), and *PLRE I* (895) consider her a stepdaughter; Barnes (1982, pp. 32–33), Pohlsander (2004, p. 14), and Odahl (2013, p. 47) believe she was Maximian's own daughter. Doubts creep in later with Barnes (2014, pp. 38–41), and both possibilities are also considered by Nixon and Rodgers (2015, p. 70).

¹⁶ Aur. Vict. 39, 25 (*divemptis prioribus coniugiis*). These divorces and marriages probably occurred simultaneously in 293 (see Chapter 5 for a discussion on this issue).

¹⁷ According to Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 20, 4), Candidianus was nine years old in 305 (*qui tunc erat novennis*).

¹⁸ Lact. *mort. pers.* 50, 2 (*Candidianum, quem Valeria ex concubina ob sterilitatem adoptaverat*).

¹⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 9.

²⁰ Leadbetter (2009, 61) tries to place her birth in 289 and make her the daughter of Galerius and Valeria, which contradicts both the established chronology and Lactantius' account. There are no compelling circumstances to indicate that Galerius married Valeria (and Constantius Theodora) in 289 rather than 293.

As to the names of the two *caesares*, Galerius' original name was probably Maximinus,²¹ but he was now C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus; Constantius' full name was now Flavius Valerius Constantius.²² We have already touched on the possibility that Maximian was adopted by Diocletian (*filius Augusti*) in 285; at any rate, he then added Diocletian's name Valerius to his own and styled himself Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus. But the situation changed when Maximian became *augustus*, and we are suddenly told that he was Diocletian's "brother" (*frater augusti Diocletiani*).²³

Relations between members of the tetrarchy were hardly built on *concordia* and harmony. Although Maximian had always been loyal to Diocletian, relations between the two new *caesares* were, as we shall see, less than ideal, with Bill Leadbetter noting that "although Diocletian had selected both of these men, neither of them had selected the other".²⁴ The tetrarchs' divine names also pose a problem. We have already seen how Maximian took on the cognomen *Herculius* (evidently as early as 286, perhaps a year later), while Diocletian emphasised his superior status by giving himself the name *Jovius*. Every subsequent legitimate tetrarch ruling in the West was *Herculius*; every subsequent tetrarch in the East was *Jovius*. When it came to the naming of the *caesares*, the younger Galerius was endowed with the "higher" cognomen of *Jovius*, while Constantius, his senior in both service rendered and age, was merely *Herculius*. Regardless of any symmetry of power, the West was clearly to be associated with Hercules, while the East was to be identified with Jupiter. Hence, Maximinus Daia and Licinius also received the cognomen *Jovius*, while Severus and Constantine were given the name *Herculius*.²⁵

Why were Constantius and Galerius chosen for the first tetrarchy? Constantius, *praeses Dalmatiae* in 285, appears to have been a friend and confidant of Maximian and was probably called to the West and assigned

²¹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 13; Jord. *Get.* 91 (*Galerius Maximinus Caesar*).

²² Hence, some sources call Galerius "Galerius Maximianus" (e.g. Jord. *Rom.* 298) and others even "Maximianus Caesar" (e.g. Festus 25), which could be confusing.

²³ The panegyric of 289 repeatedly calls Diocletian and Maximian brothers (*fratres*); see *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 1, 5. See also Rees (2002, pp. 53–54), Nixon and Rodgers (2015, p. 45).

²⁴ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 156.

²⁵ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 24; Corcoran, "Before Constantine", 51.

important duties not long after Maximian came to co-rule. Before his elevation to *caesar*, he must have held some powerful office in the West, though we do not know what it was.²⁶ Galerius was born into a peasant family in (what was to become) the province of *Dacia Ripensis*.²⁷ His mother Romula is said to have fled to this area south of the Danube from Roman Dacia,²⁸ but we do not know exactly when; it may have been in the early 250s.²⁹ Later, when Galerius was on the throne, he would name his hometown after his mother (*Felix Romuliana*), build a palace there—in imitation of Diocletian—and be buried there.³⁰ The archaeological remains of this city are located near Gamzigrad, a site near the town of Zaječar in Serbia. While the year of Galerius’ birth remains unknown to us, we can posit that he was the youngest member of the first tetrarchy. Joannes Malalas says that Galerius died at the age of 53, which would make his birth year 258, since he died in 311. Malalas’ account of the tetrarchy may be very muddled and riddled with errors (e.g. he calls Galerius “Maxentius Galerius” and has him assassinated in Rome), but his information on Galerius’ age at death falls within the bounds of possibility, so we can work with the hypothesis that he was born in 258; this would also be consistent with the supposed years in which his two children were born.³¹ Galerius was nicknamed Armentarius, “the Herdsman”, for that is what he originally was.³² Our aristocratic sources may turn up their noses at the very humble origins of Galerius and his parents, but Diocletian chose his fellow rulers on account of their proven ability and personal loyalty (both of which Galerius showed in abundance during his reign), not where they came from.

²⁶ The origins and career of Constantius will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁷ Eutr. IX, 22 (*haud longe a Serdica natus*); *Epitome* 40, 16 (*ortus Dacia ripensi*).

²⁸ Lact. *mort. pers.* 9, 2 (*mater eius Transdanuviana infestantibus Carpis in Daciam novam transiecto amne confugerat*).

²⁹ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 20.

³⁰ *Epitome* 40, 16 (here the name is given as *Romulianum*).

³¹ The year of Galerius’ birth is thus estimated by Leadbetter (2009, p. 21) at “c. 258”, and by Barnes (1982, p. 37) at “c. 260”. See Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia* XII, 47 (Dindorf, 313). Malalas appears to be thinking here of the emperor Maxentius (306–312); he may have been confused by the fact that Maxentius was married to Galerius’ daughter, but he could not have been that old at the time of his death.

³² Aur. Vict. 39, 24; 40, 1; 40, 6; *Epitome* 39, 2; 40, 1.

During the first tetrarchy, the empire was not split politically. It is also difficult to discern its territorial and administrative divisions at this time, especially in the East, because the two Eastern tetrarchs' spheres of competence are hazy. Modern scholars who have a go at defining those responsibilities rely on Aurelius Victor, who says that Constantius "was entrusted with everything north of the Alps, Maximian with Italy and Africa, Galerius with Illyricum as far as Pontus, and Diocletian retained the rest".³³ Aurelius Victor, though, was writing from the perspective of the late Constantinian dynasty, when the internal boundaries of the empire had been delineated—as opposed to the first tetrarchy, when they were evidently not defined at all. In this light, his testimony should be taken with a pinch of salt. If we were to take him literally, we could end up making mistakes and declaring, for example, that Galerius "acquired Illyricum, with a residence in Sirmium",³⁴ when in fact, if our sources allow us to determine anything, it is that Galerius' seat of residence was first Antioch and only later Thessalonica and Serdica (present-day Sofia, Bulgaria). Not to mention the fact that Galerius was a frequent traveller. Sirmium may have been the place where Galerius was elevated to the rank of *caesar*, but otherwise his presence here is not attested; on the contrary, this is the city where Diocletian would often spend the winter.³⁵ Caution is also advised when describing Galerius' defined sphere of competence. If we accept Victor's claim that Galerius was commissioned by Diocletian to defend the Danube frontier while himself taking charge of the East, i.e. Asia Minor, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt, then we have to concede that Galerius, in the first six years of the tetrarchy, was somewhere he should not have been, since we are more likely to find him in Antioch, Egypt, or Mesopotamia; his presence on the Danube frontier can only be established from 299 onwards.³⁶ And in Diocletian's case the situation is even more complicated.

³³ Aur. Vict. 39, 30 (*cuncta, quae trans Alpes Galliae sunt, Constantio commissa, Africa Italiaque Herculio, Illyrici ora adusque Ponti fretum Galerio; cetera Valerius retentavit*). Hispania is not mentioned, but, as we know from Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 8, 3), this territory was assigned to Maximian.

³⁴ Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 34.

³⁵ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 49–51 and 61–64.

³⁶ Barnes, "Imperial Campaigns", 187.

Of the emperors of the first tetrarchy, Diocletian, at least in the first period of his reign, was easily the most active traveller.³⁷ Broadly speaking, we find him not only in the Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, but also on the Middle or Upper Danube and, several times, in Italy. Often, though by no means every year, he and his court wintered in Nicomedia in Asia Minor or in Sirmium by the Danube. The court that travelled with Diocletian was bound to have included not only officials and servants, but also elite troops and a corps of *protectores*; several thousand people must have been involved.³⁸ We can reconstruct the movements of his court in some years very accurately from our sources; at other times, we are left to conjecture. We can distinguish four phases. In 284–293, the emperor travelled through places as diverse and distant as Syria, Bithynia, Thrace, Pannonia, Raetia, and Italy. He was attempting to cover the entire Danube region without losing sight of the empire’s Eastern frontier. In 293–296, having entrusted the East to his *caesar* Galerius, he restricted his travels to the Balkans. In 296–302, Diocletian was forced further afield by the Persian War and a revolt in Egypt, spending time in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Finally, in 303–305, he can be found in Nicomedia, whence he made a single but significant journey: from mid-303 to mid-304, he travelled along the Danube to Italy and then back again.

The “laziest” tetrarch was probably Constantius, who kept the Rhine frontier secure from his base in Trier (he is rarely attested elsewhere in Gaul), waged war twice in Britain (in 296 and 305–306), and, aside from one visit to Italy, never ventured beyond his assigned territory. His *augustus*, Maximian, also initially resided in Trier during the dyarchy, but in 293 he left this residence to his *caesar* and thereafter resided mostly in Milan and Aquileia in northern Italy, but also in Ravenna, Verona, and Rome; in 296, he was on the Rhine and in Hispania, and in the following three years he was in Africa. Victor’s assertion holds true, at most, for the West, where, from 293 onwards, the two tetrarchs more or less stuck to their respective parts of the empire and, by all accounts, did not interfere with each other’s jurisdiction or travel East. In the East, on the contrary, the most we might say is that there were very flexible boundaries of

³⁷ According to Burgess (2008, p. 49), Diocletian could travel 20–30 miles per day (1 Roman mile = 1480 m).

³⁸ Potter (2013, p. 68) estimates the number at 6000.

temporary territorial responsibility. Moreover, only Galerius was bound by them, as Diocletian retained global responsibility. David Potter rightly argued that any formal division of the empire would have run counter to the ideology of the tetrarchy, which required the members of the imperial college to work as a team.³⁹ Half a century later, the emperor Julian, in *Caesares*, described the members of the first tetrarchy as a close-knit club in which Diocletian alone occupied a privileged place.⁴⁰

Another problem is the cities where the tetrarchs resided. Some scholars assert that the main (but not the only) residences of the tetrarchs were essentially Nicomedia (for Diocletian), Thessalonica (Galerius), Milan (Maximian), and Trier (Constantius),⁴¹ but even if we were to accept this, we still need to stress that this is nothing but a sweeping statement trying to bring order to chaos and sum up the 20 years of the first tetrarchy. It would be more accurate to say that the empire had 6–8 main centres at the time of the first tetrarchy (Sirmium, Nicomedia, Antioch, Milan, Aquileia, Trier, and later Thessalonica and Serdica) and that at least two of them (Antioch and Nicomedia) may have been shared residences for a time: Galerius and Diocletian are attested in Antioch in the spring of 299 and again in Nicomedia at the turn of 303. As for the West, Diocletian and Maximian held talks together in Milan in late 290 and 291 and met in Rome in late 303. Rome had ceased to be an imperial residence and seldom hosted an emperor at all. Throughout the first tetrarchy, it was visited only by Diocletian and Maximian, the former at most twice and the latter about four times.

Everywhere the emperor went, his court was sure to follow. The core of Diocletian's court, like that of his predecessors, was the imperial council (*consilium principis*).⁴² Here, the emperor's advisers and friends were joined by a group of senior officials from the equestrian order, who were

³⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 368.

⁴⁰ Julian, *Caesares* 315 A. The two surviving sculptures of the tetrarchs—in St Mark's Square in Venice and in the Vatican—also faithfully reflect this ideology. Indeed, in the first of these sculptures, not only are the members of the first tetrarchy depicted in fraternal harmony, but the physiognomic similarity of the emperors makes it impossible to discern which is which.

⁴¹ E.g. Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 67; Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 48.

⁴² For a discussion on the *consilium principis* and its evolution into the imperial *consistorium*, see Chapter 10.

responsible for the central authorities' various secretariats. By this time, these bureaux had come to be known as *scrinia*, and the people in charge of them also had new titles: the official whose duty was to answer petitions from private persons (*a libellis*) was now called *magister libellorum*; the heads of offices responsible for formulating the emperor's letters to cities, governors, and other officials in Latin (*ab epistulis latinis*) and Greek (*ab epistulis Graecis*) were called *magister epistularum Latinarum* and *magister epistularum Graecarum*, respectively; and the *scrinium memoriae*, which we would think of as archives, was managed by the *magister memoriae* (formerly *magister a memoria*).⁴³ Two officials were in charge of financial matters: the administration of public finances (including mints and precious-metal mining) was overseen by the *rationalis summae rei*⁴⁴; the imperial estates (“the property of the crown”), once administered by an official called *a patrimonio*, were now managed by the *rationalis rei privatae*.⁴⁵ As the importance of these offices dwindled when inflation took hold in the third century, the praetorian prefect—as the official responsible for supplying the army—saw his prominence rise. This effectively made the praetorian prefect a third (and the most important) finance minister, since most taxes were paid in kind (*annona*).⁴⁶

IMPORTANT POLITICAL EVENTS DURING THE FIRST TETRARCHY

As we saw in the previous chapter, soon after Maximian's elevation to *augustus* there was a successful attempt to create a separatist empire in Roman Britain, with Carausius (286–293) and, after him, Allectus (293–296) exercising sovereign rule over this territory. Maximian was initially tied up elsewhere, as securing the Rhine and Danube frontiers was clearly a higher priority. Once he did get round to dealing with the British problem, his invasion of the island (289) floundered and the recapture

⁴³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 50–51. Cf. Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 45 (“exact duties unspecified”). All these offices may have been renamed before Diocletian's reign (cf. Potter, 2004, p. 295).

⁴⁴ He administered land taxes (*tributum soli*), personal taxes (*tributum capitis*), and the *aurum coronarium* and *aurum oblativum* (these taxes and Diocletian's tax reform are discussed below).

⁴⁵ Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 13–15.

⁴⁶ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 411–412.

of Britain was postponed. Although Constantius began to grapple with Carausius' revolt immediately after his appointment as *caesar*, in 293 the most he succeeded in doing was cutting Carausius off from Gaul by retaking Bononia. A little later in that year, Carausius was assassinated by one of his own men, Allectus, who took over from him.⁴⁷ Constantius, in the meantime, had built a fleet and embarked on an expedition to the area between the Scheldt and the Rhine to campaign against the Chamavi and the Frisii.⁴⁸ After making careful preparations and drawing on the generous assistance of the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus, he successfully invaded the island in 296 and Roman Britain was finally rejoined to the empire.⁴⁹

In the same year, revolutionary events began to unfold in the East. In the previous chapter, we discussed Diocletian's diplomatic success in his handling of the Persians in the East in 287. With nothing of significance happening on the Persian frontier, he was free to concentrate on other problems. All this changed after the accession of Shapur I's son, Narseh (293–302).⁵⁰ Determined to expunge the ignominy brought about by his nephew Bahram II, Narseh invaded Armenia—which Ammianus Marcellinus noted “rightfully belonged to the Romans”—in 296.⁵¹ King Tiridates III, installed in Armenia in 287 by Diocletian, now had to

⁴⁷ Nothing is known about the position Allectus held in Carausius' empire, but some coins minted by Carausius are marked “RSR”, which may be interpreted as *rationalis summae rei* (Casey 2005, 64–65). Bowman (2008a, p. 79) directly identifies this financial official with Allectus, whom Aurelius Victor (39, 41) describes as Carausius' finance minister (*summae rei praesesset*).

⁴⁸ *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 8–9. Barnes (1982, p. 60) suggests that this campaign also took place in 293.

⁴⁹ *Eutr.* IX, 22; *Aur. Vict.* 39, 42. This is the year ventured by Barnes (1982, p. 60) and Casey (2005, p. 35). Kienast (1996, p. 280) believes it was more likely to have been in 297, but concedes that 296 is also possible.

⁵⁰ Narseh, despite being the son of Shapur I, had to wait more than 20 years after his father's death to ascend the throne; he was preceded by his brothers Hormizd (270–271) and Bahram I (271–274), and even his nephew Bahram II (274–293). This is why some Roman sources mistake him for Shapur's grandson (*Jord. Get.* 110; *Lact. mort. pers.* 9, 5).

See Frye (2006, p. 178), Frye (2008). Some (Bowman, 2008a, p. 81) place the beginning of his reign in 294, others (Goldsworthy, 2009, p. 172) cannot decide between 293 and 294.

⁵¹ *Amm. Marc.* XXIII, 5, 11 (*Narseus primus Armeniam Romano iuri obnoxiam occuparat*).

seek asylum in Roman territory.⁵² Narseh then headed south to Osroene. Diocletian, busy fighting the Carpi on the Danube, responded by sending his *caesar* Galerius, who was probably in Syria at the time, to confront the Persians while he himself raised reinforcements on the Danube and then also hastened to the East. With Narseh outnumbering Galerius, it may have been wiser to wait for Diocletian's arrival, but we do not know what communication took place between the two emperors and what orders Galerius received. In any event, Galerius' attempt at a counter-attack in the spring of 297 failed and he was defeated in battle between the cities of Carrhae and Callinicum in northern Mesopotamia. This handed Narseh control of Roman Mesopotamia. When Diocletian met Galerius in Antioch, he reprimanded him severely for his failure. In front of everyone, Galerius was made to walk (or run, according to some sources) a mile (or more) ahead of Diocletian's chariot, despite being dressed in the purple robes of an emperor. This story (which may be a later invention) is told with slight variations by numerous authors. If the similar diction they employ is anything to go by, they all drew on a single source (probably the *Kaisergeschichte*). Typically, Lactantius, who is not dependent on this source, knows of no such thing (and considering how much he loathed Galerius, he would have been only too happy to mention this humiliation).⁵³

However, since Diocletian himself was otherwise engaged in suppressing the revolt in Egypt (on which see below), he once again put Galerius in charge of this war. When Galerius invaded Armenia in 298, or perhaps as early as the autumn of 297, he took with him a good-sized army, mostly assembled from inhabitants of the Danubian provinces (Festus says he had 25,000 men). Narseh, accepting the challenge, marched against him. In all probability, the battle was fought somewhere east of the Armenian city of Satala in 298.⁵⁴ Galerius, who

⁵² Frye, "The Sassanians", 471. For a detailed analysis of the succession to the Armenian throne, see Chapter 10.

⁵³ Eutr. IX, 24 (*per aliquot passuum milia purpuratus tradatur advehiculum cucurrisse*); Festus 25 (*ante carpentum eius per aliquot milia passuum cucurrerit purpuratus*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 301 (*Galerius Maximianus victus a Narseo ante carpentum Diocletiani purpuratus cucurrit*); Amm. Marc. XIV, 11, 10 (*in Syria Augusti vehiculum irascentis, per spatium mille passuum fere pedes antegressus est Galerius purpuratus*). See also Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 9; Jord. *Rom.* 301. Cf. Lact. *mort. pers.* 9, 5–7.

⁵⁴ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 151; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 94; Kuhoff, *Diokletian und die Epoche der Tetrarchie*, 173.

is said to have personally scouted the terrain in advance with only two horsemen, took the great king by complete surprise.⁵⁵ After his camp was raided, Narseh himself barely escaped the battle, but his entire family, including his wives, sisters, and children, not to mention the royal treasure, was captured. This opened up a path for Galerius to pass through Armenia, Media, and Adiabene, making his way along the Tigris until he reached Ctesiphon. While we do not know whether he plundered this city, we are told (by a later author) that the return journey took him along the Euphrates and past the fortress of Anatha (present-day Anah, Iraq).⁵⁶ By the end of 298, he had re-secured northern Mesopotamia for Rome and brought Armenia back within the Roman sphere of influence. Diocletian, who had meanwhile dealt with the situation in Egypt, met and congratulated his *caesar* in Nisibis in the spring of 299, and together they dispatched the terms of their peace treaty to Narseh.⁵⁷ The king had no choice but to accept their offer if he wished to get back his family (whom the Romans had treated with all due respect). The treaty included a new status for Armenia (the territory of which had been extended quite a way eastwards), designated Nisibis (now in Roman territory) as the only place of trade between the two parties, and, above all, forced Narseh to cede to Rome the five satrapies between the Tigris and Armenia. In other words, everything west of the Upper Tigris was now Roman.⁵⁸ This was the greatest victory achieved in the East since the time of Trajan. Most importantly, it secured peace there for a very long time: it would not be until 337 (under Constantine) that another war broke out with the Persians.

As for the revolt in Egypt, a certain Lucius Domitius Domitianus is attested as the usurper on papyri and coins. The trouble here is that

⁵⁵ Eutr. IX, 25; Festus 25. Ammianus (XVI, 10, 3) is another writer who alludes to the fact that Galerius personally reconnoitred the enemy camp.

⁵⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus (XXIV, 1, 10), when describing the emperor Julian's expedition to Persia in 363, mentions a Roman soldier found by Julian's army in this fortress after it had surrendered to the Romans. That soldier, by now almost a hundred years old, claimed that he had been left there by Galerius after falling ill (*miles quondam, cum Maximianus perripisset quondam Persicos fines, in his locis aeger relictus*).

⁵⁷ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 302 (*Galerius Maximianus, superato Narseo, et uxoris, ac liberis, sororibusque eius captis, a Diocletiano ingenti honore suscipitur*).

⁵⁸ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 89–96; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 292–293; Frye, “The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians”, 130–131; Frye, “The Sassanians”, 470–471; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 177–179.

literary sources are completely silent on him and instead mention that a rebel named Aurelius Achilleus usurped imperial power in Alexandria.⁵⁹ This Achilleus appears to have been a *corrector* under Domitianus.⁶⁰ This was a far-reaching rebellion that engulfed the whole province and took eight months to put down. Barnes reconstructs these events as follows: Domitianus usurped power in Egypt in late August 297; this usurpation was crushed and Domitianus was killed in December of the same year, but Achilleus continued the revolt in Alexandria; Diocletian was forced to besiege Alexandria, but did not succeed in taking it until several months later, probably in March 298.⁶¹ The later Byzantine historian John Malalas tells us an interesting story about Diocletian's conquest of Alexandria. Diocletian is said to have ordered his soldiers to keep on slaying the people of Alexandria until the blood had risen to the knees of his horse. It just so happened that, upon entering the city, Diocletian's horse stumbled over the corpse of an Egyptian. Its knee scraped against the dead body and was smeared with blood. The emperor, noticing this, ordered his men to stop the killing. The Alexandrians erected a bronze statue of the horse to show their gratitude. As late as Malalas' time (the sixth century), the site of the statue was evidently known as "Diocletian's Horse".⁶² The emperor remained in Egypt for the rest of the year in order to make sure this territory was secure. He sailed up the Nile and made treaties with two tribes, the Nobatae and the Blemmyes. He ceded the territory south of the Syene to the former and charged it with defending Roman Egypt against the latter. He then began to make regular annual payments in gold to both.⁶³ It was probably on this occasion that the emperor administratively split Egypt into two provinces—Egypt proper and a southern part, Thebais (see below). Early in 299, he repaired to Syria and, as we know, met Galerius in Nisibis in the spring.

Williams takes a quite different view of the revolt, suggesting that it was aimed at gaining independence for Egypt, and for this reason the

⁵⁹ Aur. Vict. 39, 23 and 38; *Epitome* 39, 3; Eutr. IX, 22 *et al.*

⁶⁰ Bowman, "Diocletian and the first tetrarchy", 81.

⁶¹ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 11–12. Kienast (1996, p. 270) agrees, but believes the beginning of the uprising may have begun in the summer of 296.

⁶² Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia* XII 41 (Dindorf, pp. 308–309).

⁶³ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 17; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 211.

rebels are said to have allied themselves with Narseh. Aside from the fact that some Roman forces would have been tied up in Egypt in order to suppress the rebellion, it is not entirely clear what use Narseh would have had for such an alliance or what the rebels would have gained had Narseh taken Egypt. Dissatisfaction with high taxes seems a more natural and simpler explanation of the causes of the revolt.⁶⁴ Another controversial claim put forward by Williams is that Domitianus was merely a stooge and that the real leader of the rebellion was Achilleus all along, i.e. their roles as leaders were concurrent, not successive. This, too, is within the realms of possibility, but in the absence of evidence it must remain a mere hypothesis.⁶⁵

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the emperor Aurelian had previously moved part of the Carpi tribe into Roman territory. Our sources assure us that the tetrarchs completed the work by relocating the rest of this Dacian tribe into Roman territory, specifically Pannonia. What we do not know, however, is whether Diocletian or Galerius was responsible for this transfer, and there is also a problem with dating. Although Jerome and the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* are precise about the year, saying the Carpi moved in 295,⁶⁶ this seems too early. We need to take into account the *Carpicus maximus* victory title the tetrarchs awarded themselves repeatedly in 301–304.⁶⁷ If the tetrarchs had transferred the Carpi in 295, why did they bestow upon themselves this title four more times in succession at the beginning of the new century? Although the tetrarchs' victory titles were essentially shared, i.e. the triumph of one member of the imperial college was presented as the victory of all four,⁶⁸ thus also avoiding unnecessary rivalry, it should not be difficult to determine who was responsible for the transfer by studying the recorded movements of the courts of the two Eastern tetrarchs and their spheres of responsibility. As we have seen, Galerius was in the East until at least 299, and it was only in the early fourth century that he could have taken over responsibility for

⁶⁴ On Diocletian's tax reform, which may have been one of the triggers of the revolt (Bowman 2008a, p. 82), see below.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 81.

⁶⁶ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 295; *Cons. Const.* s. a. 295.

⁶⁷ According to Barnes (1982, pp. 63–64, p. 257), Galerius was *Carpicus maximus* for the first time in 296 (even though the victory was evidently Diocletian's), then in each of the years 301–304, and finally in 308 or 309.

⁶⁸ See Barnes (1982, p. 27).

the Danube frontier from Diocletian. If we accept the hypothesis that the repeated defeat of the Carpi and their subsequent relocation occurred in the early years of the fourth century rather than at the end of the third century, we can conclude that it was Galerius who relocated the Carpi, probably in 304.⁶⁹

Certain accounts of this event report that it was not just the Carpi that the tetrarchs moved to the empire; some of the Sarmatians and the rest of the Bastarnae (to join those who had already been displaced to Roman territory by Probus) were also resettled here, probably at the same time. Several sources attribute this to the tetrarchs in general,⁷⁰ others specifically name Diocletian and Galerius,⁷¹ and then there are three that ascribe the displacement of the Carpi to one (but not the same) emperor. Ammianus Marcellinus suggests that it was Diocletian who moved the Carpi, and even who tells us that Pannonia had been singled out for the resettlement.⁷² However, his account is rather ambiguous; Diocletian himself may not have attended to these operations personally, but may have delegated them to Galerius, as categorically stated by Jordanes⁷³ and, especially, Lactantius. The latter mentions that the later emperor Maximinus Daia is said to have surrounded himself with barbarians “who had been driven out of their lands by the Goths at the time the *vicennalia* were being celebrated, and who had surrendered to Maximian

⁶⁹ According to Bowman (2008a, p. 80), the Carpi may have relocated to Pannonia in either 295–296 or 303–304. Leadbetter (2009, p. 99; cf. 101) reckons it was directly 304 or 305. Only one source—the panegyric from 297—seems to confirm 295/296, cf. *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 5, 1–2 (*adoratae sint igitur mihi Sarmaticae expeditiones quibus illa gens prope omnis extincta est [...] proxima illa ruina Carporum*). In this light, Nixon and Rodgers (2015, p. 116, note 17) suggest the spring of 297. However, the text of the panegyric only mentions Roman victories, not the relocation of the tribe.

⁷⁰ Aur. Vict. 39, 43 (*Carporumque natio translata omnis in nostrum solum, cuius fere pars iam tum ab Aureliano erat*).

⁷¹ Eutr. IX, 25 (*Carpis et Basternis subactis, Sarmatis victis, quarum nationum ingentes captivorum copias in Romanis finibus locaverunt*); Oros. Hist. VII, 25, 12 (*strenue adversus Carpos Basternasque pugnatum est. Sarmatas deinde vicerunt: quorum copiosissimam captivam multitudinem per Romanorum finium dispersere praesidia*).

⁷² Amm. Marc. XXVIII, 1, 5 (*Carporum, quos antiquis excitis sedibus Diocletianus transtulit in Pannoniam*).

⁷³ Jord. Get. 91 (*Carporum [...] quos Galerius Maximinus Caesar devicit et rei publicae Romanae subegit*).

(i.e. Galerius) to the detriment of the whole human race”.⁷⁴ Diocletian and Maximian held these *vicennalia*, or 20th anniversary celebrations, in Rome in the autumn of 303,⁷⁵ and Lactantius is very likely to have had the Carpi in mind.⁷⁶ The mention of the Goths here also serves as a reminder that the subjugation of Dacia by this Germanic tribal confederation was nearing completion by the turn of the fourth century (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Other wartime events during the first tetrarchy are also hard to date. Sometime around 300, Constantius triumphed over the Alamanni at Lingones (the name of both a Gallic tribe and a city—present-day Langres in north-eastern France) and Vindonissa (modern-day Windisch in northern Switzerland). That is virtually all we know about the event (or, to be more precise, events, as the sites are nearly 300 km apart). We know neither whether these battles were part of a single campaign, nor the year in which they were fought. These battles were first mentioned by the panegyric of 310, which barely goes further than disclosing the names of the places, observing only that the emperor was wounded at Lingones and that many bones of the enemy forces who fell could still be seen at Vindonissa.⁷⁷ Eutropius offers a little more detail, saying that Constantius experienced defeat and tasted victory in a single day at Lingones. A surprise attack by the Alamanni forced the emperor to take refuge in the city, but since its gates had already been closed in defence against the approaching enemy, the locals hauled him over the walls by rope. Within five hours, a relief army had arrived at the city and, in the ensuing battle, “nearly 60,000 Alamanni” fell.⁷⁸ Echoes of this event can still be found

⁷⁴ Lact. *mort. pers.* 38, 6 (*nam fere nullus stipator in latere ei nisi ex gente eorum, qui a Gothis tempore vicennalium terris suis pulsus Maximiano se tradiderant malo generis humani*).

⁷⁵ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 152.

⁷⁶ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 99. Maximinus Daia was the son of Galerius’ sister and, as we know, Galerius’ mother had fled to Roman territory from the very part of Dacia that was occupied by the Carpi; it is possible that her son was now arranging for the Carpi to be herded into Roman territory.

⁷⁷ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 6, 3 (*Quid commemorem Lingonicam victoriam etiam imperatoris ipsius vulnere gloriosam? Quid Vindonissae campos hostium strage completos et adhuc ossibus opertos?*). Other sources (see below) make no mention of any victory at Vindonissa.

⁷⁸ Eutr. IX, 23 (*Per idem tempus a Constantio Caesare in Gallia bene pugnatum est. Circa Lingonas die una adversam et secundam fortunam expertus est. Nam cum repente barbaris ingruentibus intra civitatem esset coactus tam praecipiti necessitate ut clausis portis*

in the works of later (sometimes much later) writers who agree on this ludicrous number of barbarian casualties and other details.⁷⁹ It is impossible to determine the exact year of these events; scholars usually date them to either the end of the third century or the first few years of the fourth century.⁸⁰ The same panegyric also mentions Constantius' victory over "a great many Germani from various tribes" (*immanem ex diversis Germanorum populis multitudinem*) who crossed the frozen Rhine to some sort of island (*insula*)—this was the mouth of the Rhine and the Germani in question were apparently Franks – but were caught off-guard when the ice suddenly thawed, leaving them trapped, surrounded by the Roman fleet, and with no alternative but to surrender. Some the Romans allowed to return home, but others they took captive (and presumably absorbed them into the imperial forces).⁸¹

PREFECTS AND PREFECTURES

One of the ways in which Diocletian changed the administration of the empire was that he splintered the power of the praetorian prefect. The gradual reform of this office then extended into Constantine's time. In tandem with this, there was a progressive split in the military and civil administration of the empire, which again continued under Constantine's solo reign.

in murum funibus tolleretur, vix quinque horis mediis adventante exercitu sexaginta fere milia Alamannorum cecidit.

⁷⁹ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 300 (*Iuxta Lingonas a Constantio Caesare LX milia Alamannorum caesa*); Jord. *Rom.* 300 (*Constantius iuxta Lingonas una die LX milia Alamannorum cecidit*); Theoph. p. 8, 4–13; Zon. XII, 31.

⁸⁰ Some rely on Eutropius' use of *per idem tempus*, with the context being the 290 s; thus Bird (1993, p. 148) considers the year 298 ("probably in A.D. 298") and Kuhoff (2001, p. 214) specifically cites that year. Others draw on the sequence of victory titles (specifically the title *Germanicus maximus*) bestowed on the tetrarchs. Barnes (1982, p. 61) separates the two battles and is quite precise in placing them in 302 and 303. Drinkwater (2007, p. 188), on the other hand, is vaguer, pondering the 301–305 range in general. For further discussion, see Nixon and Rodgers (2015, pp. 225–226, note 25), who suggest that the underlying source in this case was the *Kaisergeschichte*.

⁸¹ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 6, 4. Barnes (1982, p. 61) dates this event, which is not mentioned in other sources, to 304.

From Augustus on, the office of praetorian prefect was undoubtedly second in importance only to the imperial title itself. Under the Principate, there tended to be two praetorian prefects; rarely was there only one prefect in office. They came from the equestrian order, but could be promoted to the senate while they were in office or afterwards; sometimes a praetorian prefect would be appointed consul. Their rank of *vir eminentissimus* was the highest within the equestrian order and was reserved for them alone.⁸² Besides commanding the praetorian guard, we have also seen how, in the third century, some of them led the army into war. In addition, they had many administrative responsibilities. We have also observed how prefects often sought to exert political influence. In 217, for example, one of them declared himself emperor. Sometimes, the praetorian guard even spun out of control, e.g. under Severus Alexander and in 238. That all ended with Diocletian—after Aper, never again did a praetorian prefect attempt a coup; they served their emperors with obedience. They continued to head the military and civil administration, taking care of tax collection and army supplies. They even wielded significant judicial powers (there was no appeal against their judgments) and sometimes helped the emperor to manage his military campaigns (e.g. Constantius' invasion of Britain). As for the guard, its deployment in and around Rome had become an anachronism bereft of meaning, because Rome seldom saw an emperor at all from the late third century onwards. During the tetrarchy, some of the praetorian guard served in the East, where it was abolished by Galerius in 306. The praetorians were dealt their final blow by Constantine, who disbanded the guard in Rome in 312 after his victory over Maxentius. Even then, however, the office of prefect itself was not abolished. Instead, a greater emphasis was placed on its civil aspect. The prefect was close to the emperor and played the role of the empire's chief bureaucrat. However, exactly when this office became purely civil is a problem addressed below.

The question of how many praetorian prefects the empire had at any one time during the tetrarchy has evolved. Timothy Barnes initially assumed that each of the four emperors of the first tetrarchy had his own prefect.⁸³ He later rejected this idea and concluded that, throughout the first tetrarchy, there had always been only a pair of prefects, each

⁸² Corcoran, "Before Constantine", 45.

⁸³ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 123–139.

serving an *augustus*.⁸⁴ Even as the tetrarchy slowly disintegrated, each *augustus* (and each illegitimate *augustus*, such as Maxentius) had a praetorian prefect. Their number would thus change to reflect how many emperors the empire had.

As we have observed, Diocletian personally killed Numerian's praetorian prefect Aper and retained Carinus' praetorian prefect Aristobulus. We cannot say for sure how long Aristobulus served in this position, but by all accounts it was confined to the 280s, as he was made *proconsul Africae* in 290. We can assume that, from 286 at the latest (when Maximian was elevated to *augustus*), each of the two emperors had a praetorian prefect and his own units of praetorians.⁸⁵ One of the first praetorian prefects of the tetrarchy was undoubtedly Afranius Hannibalianus, who seems to have served Diocletian in the East sometime between 286 and 292.⁸⁶ He is paired with Julius Asclepiodotus, who, by analogy, must have been Maximian's praetorian prefect for the West at this time.⁸⁷ These two are twinned in three places: first, in an inscription (ILS 8929); next, the author of the *HA* mentions them along with Diocletian, Carus, and Constantius in a sort of list of generals who, as "very famous commanders" (*praeclarissimi duces*), came "from the school of Probus" (*ex eius disciplina*)⁸⁸; and, finally, they were consuls together in 292. Tellingly, Hannibalianus, as Diocletian's prefect, was *consul prior*, while his colleague Asclepiodotus had a slightly less honourable place in the consulship (*consul posterior*).

Sometime around 296, Hannibalianus was replaced in the East by the jurist Aurelius Hermogenianus (Hermogenian), while Asclepiodotus remained in his post until at least 296 and took part in Constantius' campaign against the usurper Allectus in that year.⁸⁹ Barnes initially "assigned" Asclepiodotus only the period between 285 and 292, believing that the praetorian prefecture in the West, specifically between 288 and

⁸⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 40; also Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 187. Inscriptions from the time of the first tetrarchy always mention only two prefects.

⁸⁵ Diocletian's praetorians are explicitly mentioned by Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 12) in connection with the destruction of a church in Nicomedia in 303.

⁸⁶ *PLRE I*, 407; Barnes, *Constantine*, 40. Elsewhere, Barnes (1982, p. 124) offers a range from 285 to 292.

⁸⁷ According to *PLRE I* (115), he was prefect from 290 to 296.

⁸⁸ *HA, Prob.* 22, 3.

⁸⁹ Potter (2013, p. 38) dates Hermogenian's prefecture to 298–302.

293, was also held by the later tetrarch Constantius. However, since a prefect named Asclepiodotus is attested for 296 as well, Barnes speculated that there were two praetorian prefects of the same name in the empire in the 290s, and that the second may, for example, have been the son of the first. Barnes later changed his mind and recognised that one and the same Asclepiodotus held the office from at least 292 and at least until 296; logically, then, Constantius could not have been praetorian prefect before he became *caesar*.⁹⁰

Before being appointed as Diocletian's praetorian prefect, Hermogenian was his *magister libellorum*. It was in this capacity that, in 295, he produced a small collection of laws dealing mainly with private law. Known as the *Codex Hermogenianus*, it consisted mainly of imperial rescripts from 293 to 294. It has not survived. The *Codex Gregorianus*—likewise no longer extant—is similar. We do not even know the name of the jurist who compiled this work (Gregorius or Gregorianus?). Whoever he was, around 292 he put together a collection of imperial laws issued in the period from the time of Hadrian until 291. To deduce the focus, scope, and purpose of these two codes, we must lean on the much later *Codex Justinianus*, which drew on them for inspiration. Both works were updated at least once; the *Codex Hermogenianus* was slightly shorter than the *Codex Gregorianus*.⁹¹

The few other surviving names of the first tetrarchy's praetorian prefects are difficult to place in time or even in office, i.e. it is not easy to determine when and which *augustus* they served. The problem is compounded by the fact that some of them are identified in our sources only by the term *praefectus* (or its Greek equivalent), so we cannot be

⁹⁰ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 37 and 124–126. Barnes was drawing on hints provided by panegyrics, see *Pan. Lat.* V (8), 1, 5; 2, 1; X (2), 11, 4 (on which see especially Nixon and Rodgers, 2015, p. 70). A strong argument against this hypothesis is the simple fact that the *Origo* does not mention such office being held by Constantius. Cf. *PLRE I*, 228, Constantius 12 (“He was not PPO”); Barnes (2014, p. 40). The discovery of inscription *AE* 1987, 456 was significant as it suggests that Asclepiodotus and Hermogenian were prefects sometime during the reign of the *caesar* Constantius (293–305). Some (e.g. Lenski, 2007b, p. 59; Pohlsander, 2004, p. 14) still cling to Barnes' hypothesis, though not all of them are entirely convinced. Clauss (1996, p. 18), for example, hesitantly says that “wahrscheinlich war er damals Prätorianerprefekt”.

⁹¹ Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs*, 25–42.

sure whether they were indeed praetorian prefects.⁹² Sometimes even the historicity of a particular figure may be questionable. Take one Verconnius Herennianus. The only mention of him is in the *Historia Augusta*, where he actually crops up in two different biographies. The biography of Probus has already been quoted here; in that passage, Herennianus is mentioned as one of the commanders who came from “the school of Probus”, along with Diocletian, Carus, Constantius, Hannibalianus, and Asclepiodotus. In Aurelian’s biography he is identified directly as Diocletian’s praetorian prefect and is again mentioned in connection with Asclepiodotus.⁹³ This link and the references in the two different biographies of the *Historia Augusta*—notwithstanding the fact that the *HA* is most likely the work of a single author, and even though Herennianus is not mentioned elsewhere—suggest that he genuinely existed; Verconnius Herennianus could have been Diocletian’s prefect in the late 290s, for example.⁹⁴ We will revisit the evolution of the post-Diocletian praetorian prefecture later.

The prefecture of the city of Rome and the consulship were, and under the tetrarchy remained, highly prestigious positions within the imperial hierarchy. However, as far as the consulship was concerned, the year 288 marked the end of the tradition where emperors and prominent members of the senate shared consular authority. Until then, this was a quite common practice in the third century.⁹⁵ After 288, the consulship was held either just by a pair of emperors (the two *augusti*, the two *caesares*, or one *augustus* and one *caesar*) or just by senators (often praetorian prefects who had been elevated to the senate).⁹⁶ In other words, at no time after this did the tetrarchs or Constantine or his sons have any need to raise to the consulship someone who was not an emperor or a member of

⁹² Cf. *PLRE I* (1047): Flaccinus, Asclepiades, Philippius, and Pomponius Ianuarius; Barnes (1982, p. 137) turns a blind eye to the last two.

⁹³ *HA, Aurel.* 44, 2 (*Verconnius Herennianus praefectus praetorio Diocletiani teste Asclepiodoto saepe dicebat Diocletianum frequenter dixisse, cum Maximiani asperitatem reprehenderet, Aurelianum magis ducem esse debuisse quam principem*).

⁹⁴ *PLRE I* (421) mentions him, albeit doubtfully; Barnes (1982, p. 137) ignores him.

⁹⁵ Counting only pairs of ordinary consuls, in 201–300, there were 49 cases where the consuls were two senators, 21 cases where the consuls were two emperors (an emperor with his co-emperor or son), and 30 cases where the consuls were the emperor and a senator.

⁹⁶ Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 47; Stephenson, *Constantine*, 238.

the imperial family. When Ammianus Marcellinus later wrote that, before 363, the last time anyone who was neither emperor nor a member of the imperial family had been co-consul with the emperor was in 285, he was only slightly wrong.⁹⁷ In this respect, Ammianus specifically names Aristobulus, whom we learn served as both praetorian prefect and co-consul in 285 under Carinus, with Diocletian then not only confirming him as praetorian prefect but also retaining him as consul for the rest of 285. Not to mention the fact that Aristobulus later became urban prefect of Rome. Ammianus forgot (or did not know) that the emperor Maximian's co-consul in 288 had been a certain Pomponius Iuanuarianus, whose career followed a similar trajectory to that of Aristobulus: he was governor in Egypt in 284, but joined Diocletian; he was a mere *eques*; and Diocletian rewarded him with membership of the senate, a consulship, and immediately afterwards an urban prefecture (288–289).⁹⁸

In the *Notitia Dignitatum*, an anonymous register of dignitaries in the Roman Empire, the urban prefect of Rome (*praefectus urbis* or *praefectus urbi*) ranked just behind the praetorian prefects in prestige.⁹⁹ The term of office is attested to have ranged from one month to four years between 284 and 337,¹⁰⁰ but on average urban prefects were in office for only a year and a few months, as there were 39 prefects (some of whom held the prefecture twice) during that period. Twenty-one of them became consuls during their career and, as we have seen, some were also praetorian prefects.¹⁰¹ After Gallienus' reforms deprived the senatorial class of its dominant position in provincial administration, the urban prefecture evidently became the most important office a senator could hold. The power of the urban prefect increased further once Rome ceased to be an imperial residence. The urban prefect controlled Rome and its environs

⁹⁷ Amm. Marc. XXIII, 1, 1. In 363, the emperor Julian was consul; his co-consul (as *consul posterior*) was the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Flavius Sallustius (*PLRE I*, 797–798).

⁹⁸ *PLRE I*, 452–453. It remains to be added that *consules suffecti* (“additional” or “substitute” consuls) continued to exist until at least 400 (Barnes 1982, p. 91), by which time they were no longer of any importance.

⁹⁹ The *Notitia Dignitatum* is essentially a comprehensive list describing the civil and military structure of the Roman Empire as it existed in its Eastern part in the late fourth century and in its Western part in the early fifth century (see Kelly, 2004, p. 40).

¹⁰⁰ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 112.

¹⁰¹ For lists of these prefects, see *PLRE I*, 1053–1054; Barnes (1982, p. 114).

and, like the praetorian prefect, was considered the emperor's representative in the exercise of judicial powers since, like the praetorian prefects, there was no appeal against his judgments.¹⁰²

PROVINCES AND DIOCESES

In the previous chapter, we traced how imperial administration was reformed under Gallienus. Diocletian used that reform as a solid foundation on which to build. In particular, he greatly increased the number of provinces by fragmenting the existing provinces into smaller units.¹⁰³ This had been done before, but under Diocletian we saw a change that was as massive as it was rapid, since the number of provinces doubled (from 48 to 98).¹⁰⁴ It is commonly held that Diocletian took this action because he wanted to gain better control over the provinces' financial administration, judiciary, and public policy, and specifically over municipal government bodies—the local senates or *curiae*, which were primarily responsible for tax collection.¹⁰⁵ This new type of province probably began to emerge in 293.¹⁰⁶ At the same time or a little later, the newly created provinces were clustered into groups known as dioceses, headed by an official called a *vicarius*. The dioceses were probably a response to the fact that the sudden increase in the number of provinces was too much for the praetorian prefects to handle.¹⁰⁷ The *vicarii* were officials

¹⁰² Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 47.

¹⁰³ Not all of them; some small provinces, such as Cyprus and Lusitania in Hispania, remained unchanged. Other provinces, such as *Africa* and *Asia*, were also undivided, but lost some territory nonetheless (Elton, 2018, p. 38).

¹⁰⁴ These are the figures cited by Williams (2000, pp. 221–223) and Barnes (1982, pp. 209–225).

¹⁰⁵ Lo Cascio, “The emperor and his administration”, 179–180.

¹⁰⁶ Lact. *mort. pers.* 7, 4. This is the year put forward by Bowman (2008a, p. 76) and Williams (2000, pp. 104–105). Barnes initially (1982, p. 225) conjectured that Diocletian had ordered the division of the provinces in 293 and that the process had been fairly brisk; later (2014, pp. 92–93), he took the position that the fragmentation of the provinces was not the result of a single decision, but that the process had begun before Diocletian, continued after his abdication, and was completed by an agreement between Constantine and Licinius at their conference in Milan in February 313.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 104. Bowman (2008b, p. 317) dates the formation of the dioceses to 293, while Lo Cascio (2008, p. 181) and Harries (2012, p. 53) believe it was as late as 297. Other scholars acknowledge that dioceses had been



Map 4.1 Map of the Roman Empire’s dioceses following Diocletian’s administrative reforms at the end of the third century. (Source Ancient Ancient World Mapping Center © 2020 [awmc.unc.edu]. Used by permission)

(literally, “substitutes”) “acting on behalf of praetorian prefects” (*agentes vicem praefectorum praetorio*). As they also held judicial powers, they could hear appeals against decisions made by the provincial governor. Twelve dioceses were established. According to the anonymous “Verona List” (*Literculus Veronensis*) of provinces and dioceses, probably drawn up around 314 and preserved in a 7th-century manuscript, Diocletian created the following dioceses (the number of provinces in the diocese is given in parentheses): *Oriens* (15), *Pontica* (7), *Asiana* (8), *Thracia* (6), *Moesiae* (11), *Pannoniae* (7), *Britanniae* (4), *Galliae* (8), *Viennensis* (7), *Italia* (12), *Hispaniae* (6), *Africa* (7) (Map 4.1).¹⁰⁸

Pannonia is an example of a newly organised region. The original two provinces of Upper and Lower Pannonia (*Pannonia Superior*, *Pannonia Inferior*) were divided into four after Diocletian’s reform. Both original

created by Diocletian, but do not commit to a year (Southern, 2004, p. 163; Potter, 2004, p. 368; Odahl, 2013, p. 53).

¹⁰⁸ For a complete listing of provinces and details, see Barnes (1982, pp. 201–208).

names were retained, with *Savensis* being hived off from the former, and *Valeria* (which Diocletian named after his daughter) from the latter.¹⁰⁹ These four provinces were joined by Noricum, now divided into two provinces (*Noricum Ripense* and *Noricum Mediterraneum*), and, with the addition of Dalmatia, the Pannonian diocese was born.

The division between senatorial and imperial provinces disappeared. To be sure, the provinces of *Africa* and *Asia* continued to be administered by senatorial governors carrying the grand title of *proconsul*, who were directly responsible to the emperor,¹¹⁰ but their territory was now much smaller. The emperor alone appointed governors for all the provinces, and even the urban prefect in Rome.¹¹¹ Italy (*Italia*) was divested of its special status and became a twelve-province diocese which, unusually, had two *vicarii*. These provinces were headed by governors called *correctores*, who were mostly from the senatorial class.¹¹² The bulk of the governors of the provinces outside Italy, on the other hand, came from the equestrian order (as a continuation of the trend started in Gallienus' time).¹¹³ Most of them held the lower title of *praeses*, first encountered during Gallienus' reign, and the rest bore the higher title of *corrector*.¹¹⁴ Egypt (*Aegyptus*) was also reduced to an ordinary province and split in two: in the 290s,

¹⁰⁹ Amm. Marc. XIX, 11, 4; cf. Aur. Vict. 40, 10.

¹¹⁰ Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 38. This was normally also the case in the province of Achaëa, which was usually administered by a *proconsul* (e.g. the poet Publius Optatianus Porfyrius; see Chapter 2), but around 300, for example, there is evidence of a *praeses* (see Barnes, 1982, p. 160).

¹¹¹ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 35.

¹¹² In the 280s, Italy appears to have had two governors with the title of *corrector Italiae*—one in the north, the other in the south. For example, around the time of Diocletian's accession, there was a C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus in the south (*PLRE I*, 977) and an M. Aurelius Sabinus Julianus in the north (*PLRE I*, 474). After this, there is evidence of an office called *corrector utriusque Italiae*, implying that the governorship had been united (evidently in 290–293, L. Aelius Helvius Dionysius), and from 293 there are again multiple (probably two) regional *correctores* in Italy (see Barnes, 1982, pp. 143–144). The change that resulted in two *vicarii* and twelve *correctores* occurs around 300 (see Barnes, 1982, pp. 218–219; Lo Cascio, 2008, pp. 180–181).

¹¹³ Kuhoff, *Diokletian und die Epoche der Tetrarchie*, 332.

¹¹⁴ From 320, *consularis*, superior to the titles of *corrector* and *praeses*, started to be used for some governors. In Syria, for example, the governor's title was originally *praeses*, but from about 325 onwards it is attested here as *consularis*. The governor of Campania in Italy was originally a *corrector*, but from 324 he is elevated to the rank of *consularis* (Barnes, 1982, p. 153, 163).

its southern half became the province of Thebais, governed by a *praeses*; Egypt proper was managed by an official who kept the title of *praefectus Aegypti*.¹¹⁵

All these measures were restricted to civil administration; Diocletian organised the defence of the empire separately. The administrative reform saw provincial governors stripped of all military power, leaving them responsible solely for collecting taxes and exercising judicial power. The same applied to those in charge of the dioceses. Legates disappeared and military authority was assigned to military commanders called *duces*. Which brings us to the reform of the army.

DIOCLETIAN'S ARMY

The army that Diocletian took over in 284 was born of the emperor Gallienus' reforms. Diocletian built on his predecessor's work by introducing military reforms of his own. Diocletian, who probably entered the military in the final years of Gallienus' reign, was a product typical of that emperor's reforms, which gave men of humble birth, such as himself, a shot at commanding the army. The tetrarchy persevered with this trend; indeed, as we have seen, at least two of Diocletian's colleagues (Maximian and Galerius) were very low-born.

We can be sure that Diocletian made moves to divide the army between himself and his co-ruler Maximian; once the *caesares* were appointed, they too acquired armies of their own. Diocletian was also constantly strengthening these armies: besides maintaining the existing legions, he gradually created many new units. He placed an emphasis on the cavalry and a strong central reserve (or, more precisely, reserves), both of which were foreshadowed by Gallienus' creation of an elite cavalry corps permanently stationed at Milan.¹¹⁶ Although we find no mention of these *equites* of Gallienus (and also of Claudius and Aurelian) during Diocletian's reign, and although this corps was probably not a direct forerunner

¹¹⁵ According to Harries (2012, p. 52), this territory was divided no later than 298, probably in connection with the suppression of a revolt in Egypt in that year (see above), but cf. Bowman (2008b, p. 317), who believes that a split as early as 295 is plausible.

¹¹⁶ Certain steps towards establishing a central reserve had already been taken at the end of the second century by Septimius Severus, who permanently stationed his newly formed *Legio II Parthica* in Italy (see Chapter 3). Diocletian's army is also discussed in Appendix C.

of the mobile armies we know from the tetrarchs' time, they unquestionably reflected the general trend towards building up mobile units and, especially, the cavalry as the Roman army's main strike force.

We have seen that Diocletian and Maximian initially engaged in rather modest and defensive warfare. The first indication we have that the empire had enough forces for a limited offensive was the joint strike against the Alamanni in 288, but even then Diocletian and Maximian had to combine their elite escorts to achieve their planned operational objectives. By 296, however, the empire had raised the forces required for three major and almost simultaneous offensive actions: Britain was reconquered by Constantius, and a year later Galerius was at war with the Persians while Diocletian was suppressing a revolt in Egypt. The imperial forces had grown. That was beyond question. But by how much?

The number of soldiers this new army had is discussed in detail in Appendix C; at this point, it is sufficient to note Lactantius' observation that Diocletian, by appointing three more emperors, "divided the world into four parts" and created three more armies, and that each of the tetrarchs now aspired to a "much larger" army than the emperors before Diocletian had had.¹¹⁷ Lactantius' assertion that there were four times as many troops under Diocletian is obviously preposterous and, in all likelihood, merely echoes the fact that each of the tetrarchs had his own army. If some 350,000 men served in the armed forces of the late Principate, and the maximum strength of the Roman army under Diocletian was around 450,000 men (see Appendix C), this translates into an increase not of 300%, as Lactantius claims, but of 30%. What is more, this increase undoubtedly took place over a period of many years. To make this uptrend sustainable, individual towns were responsible for conscripting local men, and the sons of veterans were encouraged to join the army.¹¹⁸

As we have already mentioned, the officers Diocletian placed in command of military units in the provinces were known as *duces*. The region under their command did not always coincide with the boundaries of the provinces; some of them commanded units in several provinces at once. For example, Egypt, although divided into different provinces, still had a single military commander (*dux*) who was charged with the defence

¹¹⁷ Lact. *mort. pers.* 7, 2 (*tres enim participes regni sui fecit in quattuor partes orbe diviso et multiplicatis exercitibus, cum singuli eorum longe maiorem numerum militum habere contenderent, quam priores principes habuerant*).

¹¹⁸ Campbell, "The Severan dynasty", 126.

of both Egypt and Thebais, as well as the two Libyas.¹¹⁹ Although the military commander and the civilian governor were each responsible for their own duties and tasks, there were naturally some areas (such as keeping the army supplied) in which they worked together. Significantly, the *duces* were still accountable to the praetorian prefects during the reign of Diocletian.¹²⁰

It is not clear whether the division of the Roman army into mobile (*comitatenses*) and frontier (*limitanei* or *ripenses*) units was the work of Diocletian or Constantine. This division is not mentioned until the second half of Constantine's reign.¹²¹ The key account here is provided by Zosimus, who praises Diocletian for leaving all his troops at the frontier to put an immediate stop to barbarian incursions there, but chides Constantine for pulling most of his troops inland.¹²² If Zosimus is right, this begs the question as to when Constantine decided to create such a mobile army. Some have suggested that the most opportune time may have been after the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge (see Chapter 7).¹²³ It could just as well be argued that Constantine and Licinius would hardly have been capable of working together on such a large-scale project as the systemic reorganisation of the army. With this in mind, David Potter is more inclined to the view that the *comitatenses* had already been created by Diocletian¹²⁴; Hugh Elton, for the same reason, concludes that it was

¹¹⁹ Bowman, "Egypt from Septimius Severus to the death of Constantine", 317.

¹²⁰ Zos. II, 32.

¹²¹ *CTH* VII, 20, 4.

¹²² Zos. II, 34.

¹²³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 97; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 157 and 271–272; Claus, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 68.

¹²⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 453–454. Historians who attribute the creation of the mobile army to Diocletian include Pohlsander (2004, p. 10), Češka (2000, p. 36), and Barnes (2014, p. 154). The latter sets out reasons why the *ripenses* could have existed before 311 based on archaeological evidence from Gamzigrad (see above). Indeed, we know of the confirmed existence, from the time Galerius was building his palace in Gamzigrad, of a commander with the title *praepositus ripae*, who was in charge of five cohorts (approximately 2500 men, i.e. half a traditional legion) from a legion stationed on the Danube. However, the same find also attests that the commander of the entire legion held the rank of *praefectus legionis*. It seems, then, that we have caught the creation of separate border troops mid-process: detached units have been formed that are permanently (?) assigned to their own specific sections of the river, but their parent legion still exists, at least formally, at this point.

actually Constantine who created the mobile army after his final victory over Licinius in 324.¹²⁵ Brian Campbell stresses the continuity underlying the development of the army and is reluctant to attribute the creation of the mobile corps to either of these emperors. In his opinion, mobile troops already existed by the time of the first tetrarchy, but they did not yet play as significant a role in the defence of the empire as they did later under Constantine.¹²⁶ Indeed, inscriptions and papyri attest that Diocletian and the other tetrarchs each had some sort of “field army” to accompany them (accordingly called the *comitatus* or “retinue”), which was considerably larger than the guard corps of *protectores*.¹²⁷ It was this continuity in the army’s evolution from Gallienus to Constantine (combined with an absence of sources reporting on how it developed) that prevents us from determining when the mobile army came into being. We therefore have no exact year for the formation of the mobile army.

The consensus, however, is that it was Constantine—evidently towards the end of his reign—who created the command positions of *magister peditum* (general of the infantry) and *magister equitum* (general of the cavalry).¹²⁸ These generals commanded the *comitatenses* and, indirectly, troops in the provinces, since the *duces* were subordinate to them.¹²⁹ When the praetorian prefects were deprived of all their military powers, this not only provided the final link in the chain of military command, but also completed the process of separating the military and civilian spheres in the administration of the empire.¹³⁰ Even the new palace guard (*scholae palatinae*), which was probably not created until Constantine’s reign, answered to a different official.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Elton, “Warfare and the Military”, 331.

¹²⁶ Campbell, “The Severan dynasty”, 121–122.

¹²⁷ This *comitatus* existed in 295 and very probably even earlier (Jones 1964, pp. 52–53). *Protectores* may have formed the core of this elite force (Harries, 2012, p. 57).

¹²⁸ The two generals actually commanded both the infantry and cavalry, hence the neutral term *magister militum* (military general) was also used (see Elton, 2007, p. 331).

¹²⁹ Zos. II, 33.

¹³⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 454; Campbell, “The Severan dynasty”, 129; Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 141.

¹³¹ This palace guard is not attested until Constantine (Southern, 2004, p. 158). On the role played by the *magister officiorum*, see Chapter 10.

Diocletian's defensive policy was conservative and rested on three pillars: increasing the number of troops; firmly securing the borders; and engaging in occasional offensives when the circumstances allowed. The cumulative effect of the Diocletian and Constantinian reforms would give rise to a new type of army that survived in the West until the end of the Western Roman Empire and in the East for a little longer.

DIOCLETIAN'S MONETARY, PRICE, AND TAX REFORMS

Diocletian's monetary reform, initiated in 294, built on the reform introduced by Aurelian (see Chapter 3). It was evidently prompted by the need to take care of a growing army; indeed, the same can be said of Diocletian's interest in keeping prices at an acceptable level and, above all, of his new tax collection system.¹³² These three reforms must therefore be viewed as a comprehensive effort by Diocletian to address the major concern of how to cover spending under the state budget, especially the needs of the army.¹³³

As to currency, the circulation system was stilled topped off by the gold *aureus*, which weighed only slightly less than in Aurelian's time (about 5.3 g versus 6.45 g).¹³⁴ As mentioned elsewhere, *aurei* (and gold in general in the empire) had always been more of a "gift metal", i.e. they were not suitable for normal financial transactions and did not form the basis of the circulation system.

The newly introduced silver *argenteus* was consistent with the original silver *denarii* of the early empire, specifically from the time of the emperor Nero, in both its weight (about 3.4 g) and high purity. This was quite extraordinary considering the lamentable fate of the devalued pseudo-silver currency we saw in the third century.¹³⁵ We have no idea

¹³² Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 59.

¹³³ A large army is expensive to maintain. Depyrot (2007, p. 246), estimating the size of Diocletian's army at 400,000 men, put the annual cost of soldiers' wages alone at nearly two million *aurei*.

¹³⁴ It had been minted at this weight since 286. In the Currency Edict (see below), this gold coin is called a *solidus*, which may be confusing as the gold *solidi* introduced by Constantine a few years later are better known.

¹³⁵ According to Sutherland (1967, p. 94), Diocletian's *argentei* had an average purity of at least 90%; according to Potter (2004, p. 393), it was as high as 95%. The nominal weight was supposed to be 3.41 g, but surviving coins are most often in the 3–3.3 g range.

what prompted Diocletian, apart perhaps from nostalgia for the days of his early empire, to put a virtually pure-silver coin into circulation.¹³⁶ When, 20 years before Diocletian, Aurelian decided to increase the silver content of *antoniniani* from 2% to about 5%, this was a much more modest but also significantly more effective move. The reaction to Diocletian's *argentei* was entirely predictable: people immediately started hoarding these almost pure-silver coins. The fact that the *argenteus* was only minted in small batches and only by certain mints (which is why it is rarely found today) meant that, even if it had remained in circulation, it would have had no major impact. To top it all off, Diocletian valued his *argenteus* at just 50 old debased *denarii* (the emperor later felt compelled to correct this mistake; see below). The old *denarii* (called *denarii communes*, or *dc*, by modern writers), despite no longer being minted or circulated, were still used to calculate prices and wages.

At the heart of Diocletian's currency reform was the *nummus* (literally "coin"),¹³⁷ a silver-washed bronze coin weighing about 10 g and containing 4% silver; it essentially played the role of the old *aurelianus*, which was no longer minted but remained in circulation. Here, too, Diocletian was emulating Nero: while the *argenteus* was intended to take over the role of the former (very pure) *denarius*, his *nummus* was supposed to become the new *sestertius*; and just as 1 *denarius* had been worth 4 *sestertii*, so 1 *argenteus* was worth 4 *nummi*. However, this system did not work as planned; as Antony Kropff points out, who would buy a product worth 4 *nummi* for 1 *argenteus* (assuming they could get their hands on one in the first place)? No one in possession of such a valuable coin would simply give it up when they could pay the same price with four less valuable coins.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Williams (2000, p. 117) suggests that Diocletian wanted to outdo Carausius, who had minted silver coins of remarkable quality and purity (see also Webb, 1972b, p. 436).

¹³⁷ At this point, it should be noted that Diocletian's reform coins are variously named by scholars because their actual names are not usually documented in the sources. For example, Potter (2004, p. 392) calls this coin the *laureatus A* (after the laurel wreath the emperor is wearing on his head). Later, in Constantine's time, this coin would be known as the *foliis*; see below. Sutherland (1967, p. 93), rather than naming any of Diocletian's reform coins, simply lists and describes them.

¹³⁸ Kropff, "Diocletian's currency system", 177.

“New *aureliani*”, weighing about 3g and containing no silver, as they were made of copper, were also minted. These were radiate coins (so-called because of the rayed-crown worn by the emperor on the obverse). Finally, copper “new *denarii*”, weighing 1.3 g and again silverless, were struck.¹³⁹ These were laureate coins, named after the laurel wreath the emperor is depicted as wearing.¹⁴⁰ They were minted only in small numbers in the West and hardly at all in the East.¹⁴¹

As with Aurelian’s reform, we are left to conjecture the relative values of these coins. Various suggestions have been made. According to one proposal, in 300 the values were as follows: 1 *aureus* = 20 *argentei* = 80 *nummi* = 1000 *dc*.¹⁴² If we add all the other types of coins, we arrive at the following ratios: 1 *aureus* = 20 *argentei* = 80 *nummi* = 250 “new *aureliani*” = 500 “new *denarii*” = 1000 *dc*.¹⁴³ Obviously, this is only a theoretical equation. The problem is that not all of the coins described were actually in circulation. The *aureus*, rather than a coin in circulation, appears to have functioned as a store of value.¹⁴⁴ The relatively high-value *argenteus*, as we have seen, was rarely found in circulation as people were quick to hoard it. To all intents and purposes, only the “new *aureliani*” (which, in accordance with Gresham’s law, seem to have rapidly displaced the more valuable old *aureliani*) and, of course, the *nummi* were circulated in sufficient quantities. The “new *denarii*” were dogged by a different problem: inflation had rendered them all but worthless. Soon after Diocletian’s abdication (305) they and the “new *aureliani*” ceased to be minted.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Sutherland (1967, p. 94) cites a negligible average of 0.1% silver (or less) for both these types of copper coins.

¹⁴⁰ Potter (2004, p. 392) therefore calls this coin the *laureatus B*.

¹⁴¹ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 331 ff.; Estiot, “The Later Third Century”, 548 ff.

¹⁴² Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 343.

¹⁴³ Estiot, “The Later Third Century”, 549. For an older (and very different) view, see Sutherland (1967, p. 99); for a comparison of the different views, see Kropff (2017, p. 171).

¹⁴⁴ Kropff (2017, pp. 173–174) notes that few of the Diocletian *aurei* found have been worn by frequent use, suggesting that most were not in circulation at all. By the late third century, it was virtually impossible to exchange *aurei* for other coins. If they were worth hundreds of *antoniniani* or *aureliani*, they could not have been in circulation (see Chapter 3). Diocletian’s reform did nothing to change this.

¹⁴⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 393.

The currency reform of 294 was therefore evidently only moderately successful at best. The main drawbacks were the excessive purity of the *argenteus* and the fact that the *nummus* and, especially, the *argenteus* were undervalued. As a result, an edict usually referred to as the Currency Edict was promulgated on 1 September 301. Also known as the Aphrodisias Edict after the city in Caria, Asia Minor, where an (incomplete) copy was found, it doubled the value of these very coins: the *argenteus* was to be worth not 50 *dc*, but 100 *dc*, and the *nummus* was to be worth 25 *dc* instead of the previous 12.5 *dc*. The other coins were to retain their value. This means the following ratios applied: 1 *aureus* = 10 *argentei* = 40 *nummi* = 250 “new *aureliani*” = 500 “new *denarii*” = 1000 *dc*.

Between 20 November and 9 December 301,¹⁴⁶ the tetrarchs issued the much more famous Edict on Maximum Prices,¹⁴⁷ which primarily sought to combat ever-spiralling inflation (by setting a ceiling on the prices of approximately 1500 products, raw materials, animals, slaves, and services). The text of the edict indicates that it was intended to apply throughout the empire, but the inscriptions in which the edict is preserved come almost without exception from a handful of Eastern provinces.¹⁴⁸ The prices thus dictated by the government to the population and applicable everywhere in the empire without distinction were set in old *denarii*, which were no longer in circulation. The text itself is very interesting and of immeasurable value to us. No other official, private, or literary text of the ancient world provides such an extensive list of goods and prices.¹⁴⁹ The general consensus today is that this edict

¹⁴⁶ Barnes (1982, p. 18) is quite precise about these dates. Estiot (2012, p. 550) reports that the Edict on Maximum Prices was issued “a few weeks” after the Currency Edict; Corbier (2008, p. 336) says that, according to some scholars, the Currency Edict dates “from three months earlier”.

¹⁴⁷ The original title has not been preserved. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 7, 6) speaks inaccurately of a law (*lex*) on the prices of goods (*pretia rerum venalium*). Theodor Mommsen gave the edict the title *Edictum Diocletiani de pretiis rerum venalium* (Lauffer, 1971, p. 3).

¹⁴⁸ It is thus conceivable that the edict was issued—and compliance with it was required—only in the East (Bowman 2008a, p. 84), or that it was promulgated in the West in another form of which we are not aware (Harries, 2012, p. 66). There is also the possibility that, in the West, inscriptions were systematically destroyed once the edict ceased to be in force (tying in with this, it is perhaps no coincidence that in the East it survives only in nondescript, easily overlooked places).

¹⁴⁹ Lauffer, *Diokletians Preisedikt*, 4.

was unsuccessful. One scholar had no qualms about calling it “an act of economic lunacy”.¹⁵⁰ In Diocletian’s defence, neither he nor anyone else in antiquity was an economist.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the edict refuses to grasp that prices depend on demand for goods and various other factors, such as the price of transportation. Instead, it speaks emotively of the avarice of merchants who artificially drive up prices, thereby sopping up wretched soldiers’ entire salaries which the whole empire has paid for through taxes.¹⁵²

Lactantius, observing the effect that the edict had on the local population in Nicomedia, noted that people were executed for even minor offences, that merchants did not dare sell their goods out of fear, and that prices rose even more. The law was then apparently revoked.¹⁵³ Interestingly, Lactantius says that Diocletian himself, by perpetrating “various injustices” (*variis iniquitatibus*), fuelled the very surge in prices he was trying to contain. Lactantius names them: extensive building, the proliferation of soldiers and provincial officials, plus an increased number of imperial residences and the high cost of relocating the imperial court from one place to another. Apart from Lactantius (and papyri from Egypt), no other source mentions what impact the edict had, and frankly we do not know how long the edict was in force. Although prices did indeed rise in the next decade, the edict was probably more effective and longer lasting than Lactantius’ account suggests.¹⁵⁴

Besides the prices of goods and services, the Edict on Maximum Prices also affected the value of coins. The price of a pound of gold was set at 72,000 *dc* (and the price of a pound of silver at 6000 *dc*, meaning that the gold-to-silver ratio was still 1:12). However, the fact that it took one pound of gold to mint sixty of Diocletian’s *aurei* meant that the *aureus* was now worth 1200 *dc*. As we have seen, the Currency Edict decreed that 1 *argenteus* should be equal to 100 *dc* and 1 *nummus* should be

¹⁵⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 335. Bruun (1966, p. 1) calls it “a monument of complete failure”. Other views are not so damning. Bowman’s verdict (2008a, 84) is that both edicts were “probably a modest success”.

¹⁵¹ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 10.

¹⁵² *Praefatio* 14 (Lauffer, 1971, p. 95). The way the edict mentions soldiers verges on the affectionate (*militēs nostri* = our soldiers), and in any case is laudatory and positive about them. All four tetrarchs spent most of their lives in the army.

¹⁵³ *Lact. mort. pers.* 7, 6–7.

¹⁵⁴ Lauffer, *Diokletians Preisedikht*, 5; Bowman, “Diocletian and the first tetrarchy”, 84.

equal to 25 *dc*. Assuming that the two edicts were complementary rather than contradictory, the equation is simple to work out: 1 *aureus* = 12 *argentei* = 48 *nummi* = 1200 *dc*. Most numismatists work on the basis that 1 “new” (and usually also old) *aurelianus* was worth 4 *dc*. This would give us: 1 *aureus* = 12 *argentei* = 48 *nummi* = 300 “new” or old *aureliani* = 1200 *dc*.¹⁵⁵ The “new *denarii*” had no impact and can be ignored here (their likely value was 1 or 2 *dc*). Kropff elegantly simplifies the whole problem even further by claiming that all other coins not circulating in the system can be disregarded. Once *aurei* are also removed from the equation, we get: 1 *argenteus* = 4 *nummi* = 25 “new” or old *aureliani* = 100 *dc*. If we also remove the rare *argenteus* and the non-existent *dc*, we arrive at this simple equation: 1 *nummus* = 6.25 “new” or old *aureliani*. And that is virtually all that remained of Diocletian’s monetary reform after 301.¹⁵⁶

If *aurei* and *argentei* were all but out of circulation in the system, larger financial transactions had to be made in the coin of nearest denomination, which was the *nummus*. It was evidently common practice to package *nummi* in sealed bags containing a set number of coins. We know of these bags from contemporary depictions, which also indicate their value. With a standard value of probably 12,500 *dc*, they would not have been easy to carry around.¹⁵⁷ In other words, prior to the Currency Edict, they contained 1000 *nummi* and weighed 10*kg*, but after the reform they contained only 500 *nummi*, i.e. 5*kg* of metal. Made of leather, these pouches were called *folles*; later, the coins which were measured by such bags also came to be known by this name. This was plainly a stopgap measure that was unsustainable in the long term, as Constantine decided to start reducing the weight of the *nummus* from 307. Besides, Constantine would come to have his own ideas on how to reform the currency in circulation (see Chapter 10).

Most freshly struck coins were destined for the army. Although soldiers were mainly paid in kind during the tetrarchy (see below), they did also

¹⁵⁵ Hendy (1985, 458) agrees.

¹⁵⁶ The mystery here of course is the poor convertibility of *nummi* to “new *aureliani*”; if 1 *nummus* was worth 6.25 “new” (or old) *aureliani*, this would have proved highly impractical for the market. Some questions simply have no straightforward answers.

¹⁵⁷ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 338. Kropff (2017, p. 178) even cites a case where a bag held 25,000 *dc*.

receive money: *stipendia* (which can be translated as “salaries”) and *donativa* (a kind of “bonus”). Under Diocletian, *stipendia* were paid three times a year (in January, May, and September), but inflation rendered their value negligible, so they were essentially only a token gesture. It was the *donativa* that carried actual real value; emperors paid these to soldiers upon accession and on politically significant occasions, whether regular, such as on the anniversary of when they assumed power (*dies imperii*) and on their birthday (*dies natalis*), or irregular, such as before a major military campaign or when the emperor held a consulship. The purpose of the *donativa* was to reinforce the bond between the army and the emperor.¹⁵⁸

In the third century, emperors felt the need to decentralise coin production, primarily so that money could be distributed more quickly to military units, but also because barbarian invasions and internal wars were a threat to communications. Consequently, there was a rise in the number of state mints within the empire in that century. From 239 onwards, state coins were minted not only in Rome, but also in Viminacium on the Danube; by the time of Valerian and Gallienus, there were six mints in the empire, and under Aurelian there were eight.¹⁵⁹ Parallel to this, there was still local coinage in the Roman East: in the middle of the third century, about a hundred cities in Asia Minor, the Balkans, and Syria were still minting their own bronze and silver coins. In this respect, Egypt had enjoyed a special status from the very dawn of imperial rule. Since the reign of Tiberius, silver tetradrachms, worth a *denarius*, had been minted in Alexandria with the permission of the emperors and under the supervision of the state, but they were valid only in Egypt and were exchanged for *denarii* upon departure from the province. Just as the *denarius* declined in the third century, so did the weight and purity of the tetradrachm. In the wake of Diocletian’s monetary reform, the Alexandrian mint stopped coining tetradrachms in 296 and became part

¹⁵⁸ The *donativa* dispensed upon imperial accession may have been substantial. Sadly, in only a few cases are we informed of the exact amount. We saw in Chapter 3 that, when Pertinax gave 12,000 *sestertii* (i.e. 3000 *denarii*) to each of the praetorians on his accession in Rome, this represented ten times the then annual salary of a rank-and-file legionary. When Julian’s soldiers elevated him to *augustus* in Paris in February 360, he promised each soldier 5 gold *solidi* and a pound of silver (Amm. Marc. XX, 4, 18). See Hebblewhite (2017, pp. 76–89).

¹⁵⁹ Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 348; cf. Lo Cascio, “The emperor and his administration”, 162.

of the unified system of state mints. All other local Greek minting in the East ceased at this time; the language of coins was now Latin alone and the coinage system in the empire had become completely uniform. Even so, the number of state mints continued to grow. By the time control over Britain was restored in 296, there were fourteen state mints working for the tetrarchs.¹⁶⁰ Yet, the currency in circulation in the West was not entirely to Diocletian's liking. As we saw in the previous chapter, after the annexation of the "Gallic Empire" by Aurelian, the very debased coinage of Tetricus and even older coins remained in circulation here alongside Diocletian's *nummi* for a long time (into the first decades of the fourth century).¹⁶¹

As already mentioned, the increasing number of soldiers in Diocletian's army burdened the state with rising costs. In connection with the collapse of silver currency, which we discussed in the previous chapter, during the third century the Roman state began to levy taxes in kind, since taxes paid in money would have been almost worthless. People were placing little faith in the value of money, but a state that was constantly debasing its coinage had even less confidence in it! These in-kind taxes, called *annona militaris* or simply *annona*, constituted the main element of soldiers' pay and were the principal direct tax imposed on the population.¹⁶² By eliminating the need to collect taxes (and pay its employees) in money, the state neatly sidestepped the problems of currency devaluation and price increases without being forced to address them. In terms of supplying the army—which, after all, was the main purpose of taxation in the late Roman Empire—this was not even necessary. Instead, each year the government imposed on *curiales* (the members of city councils) the obligation to collect in-kind taxes and made them liable—on behalf

¹⁶⁰ Estiot, "The Later Third Century", 538; Corbier, "Coinage and Taxation", 349.

¹⁶¹ Kropff, "Diocletian's currency system", 181–182; Estiot, "The Later Third Century", 545.

¹⁶² Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, 36. We do not know when the *annona* was first levied; Hebblewhite (2017, p. 90) suggests the Severan dynasty, but observes that it was not imposed regularly at that early stage. It is also unclear at what point in the third century the *annona* replaced (or supplemented and subsequently replaced) the early empire's two major taxes: the *tributum soli* and the *tributum capitis* (see Corbier, 2008, pp. 376–382).

of the entire city and its surroundings—for delivering that fiscal year's taxes.¹⁶³

To keep the wheels of Diocletian's growing army of soldiers and bureaucrats turning, tax collection had to be as efficient as possible and the tax burden had to be spread as fairly as possible over the whole empire. Nevertheless, taxpayers in some provinces were clearly shouldering too much of the burden while others elsewhere paid little; the general unfairness of the earlier system was noted by the Egyptian prefect Aristius Optatus in 297 when he promulgated Diocletian's tax reform in his province by edict. As Potter observes, the Egyptians—who until then had paid relatively low taxes—let their feelings be known almost immediately when Domitius Domitianus revolted against the government (as discussed above).¹⁶⁴

Diocletian was aware, however, that some of the population could afford to pay more than others, depending on their wealth, so it would not make sense to tax everyone equally. Another factor that clearly had to be considered was that land in some parts was more fertile than in others. Also, because of inflation, it was impossible to set a fixed monetary value on land in a situation where the real value of money was declining. Diocletian therefore did two things: first, he made in-kind tax a standard tax liability; secondly, he built the system of taxation for the whole empire on entirely new foundations. We do not know exactly when this happened,¹⁶⁵ but a tax calculation system based on a land-based unit called the *ingum* and a per-head unit of measurement known as the *caput* appears to have been gradually introduced in the empire from the early 290s. The *ingum* always had approximately the same value, but it was not a consistent measure of land, as this varied according to the type of land and the crops grown: a smaller area of prime land could correspond to a larger area of poorer-quality land, for example. Creating this system (known as *ingatio*) and putting it into operation must have been a

¹⁶³ Aside from the army, the empire's bureaucratic apparatus also consumed a great deal of resources, as did public buildings, festivals and games, and, ultimately, the process of supplying grain, wine, oil, pork, and salt to the Roman population, partly at a reduced price and partly free of charge (see Chapter 3).

¹⁶⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 334; cf. Bowman, "Diocletian and the first tetrarchy", 82.

¹⁶⁵ Corbier (2008, p. 377) suggests that the reform could have been introduced in the empire as early as 287.

gargantuan task. Tax assessors (*censitores*) visited every village in the area where the census was being undertaken. Here, they estimated the yield derived not only from arable land, but also from pastures, vineyards, olive orchards, and other agricultural areas. The second tax calculation system, *capitatio*, was just as complicated. Nominally, its unit of measurement, the *caput*, was equal to one farmer, but in some places women would be counted as one *caput* (e.g. in Syria), in others they were deemed to be half a *caput* (in Asia Minor), and in Egypt they were ignored entirely. Another variation within the system was the age at which the population was taxed (it seems that people were usually considered liable for tax between the ages of 14 and 65). Livestock were counted as fractions of a *caput*. The total tax to be levied was reached by aggregating the total *juga* and *capita* (the two units carried the same value in these calculations). The *censitores* then entered this amount in registers that were passed on to local municipal councils as the bodies responsible for collecting taxes. This combined taxation (*jugatio et capitatio*) was levied on the rural population; the taxes do not appear to have been exacted from the urban population (via *capitatio*) until the end of Diocletian's reign. This mixed method of calculating taxes depended on accurate property assessments conducted every five years. Under Diocletian, *jugatio* was paid in kind, while *capitatio* was paid in money, although here again there were regional variations.¹⁶⁶ The in-kind *annona* thus persisted to some degree, but money payments were exacted alongside it now that the monetary system had been at least partially rehabilitated. It should also be noted that the system described above was by no means uniform and varied from one part of the empire to another by reflecting local traditions.¹⁶⁷

Under this system, large families with small farms were arguably subject to more tax than landowners with large plots and many tenants (*coloni*), who paid their own *capitatio*. As A. H. M. Jones reminds us, this is always inevitable when both land and people are taxed, and there is no

¹⁶⁶ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 64; Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 59–61; Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 39.

¹⁶⁷ In some parts of the empire, taxes were levied according to a method other than the combined *jugatio-capitatio* system. This is certainly true for Egypt (where the *ingum* was not used) and probably also for Africa and parts of the Gallic prefecture (see Jones, 1957, p. 93).

reason to suppose that the system was felt to be unjust.¹⁶⁸ Taxes were at least regular in the time of the tetrarchy, and the government could, and did, grant concessions, for example, by reducing the value of a *caput* in a particular area from one man to two or more, by simply cutting a certain number of *capita* for a given town or area, or by retrospectively forgiving arrears. Diocletian's new tax system was not only efficient, but also tried to be fair. Although we have little information about Diocletian's life before 284, this extraordinary emperor seems to have been of very low birth, coming from the family of a "scribe" who worked for a certain senator (see Chapter 3). Diocletian's military service undoubtedly convinced him that the state needed to have a strong army that was well supplied and well paid. Likewise, if his father was engaged, perhaps, in bookkeeping on the senator's lands in Dalmatia, his childhood experience may have taught him the need for the tax burden to be distributed fairly; for that matter, the main purpose of taxation was to keep the army machine well oiled. We also know that Galerius, whom Diocletian chose as his closest collaborator and his successor in the East, was of peasant origin. Had he done nothing else, Diocletian's tax reform would have made him one of the greatest figures of the Roman Empire. His was the first major change to the Roman tax system since the reign of the emperor Augustus, and it remained in force, with variations, until the seventh century.¹⁶⁹

It remains to describe two other taxes that had already embedded themselves by Diocletian's time. The *aurum coronarium* was the gift of a golden crown or wreath made to the emperor on his accession and every five years thereafter. As this tax was paid by the cities, responsibility for it fell primarily on the *curiales*. The *aurum oblativium* was a similar tax paid by the senate. Since it took the form of pure gold, the value of this tax was not eroded by inflation. In the third century, it was practically the only way the government extracted gold from the people of the empire.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Jones, "Capitatio and Iugatio", 94. Cf. Bednaříková, *Stěhování národů*, 31; Češka, *Zápis antického světa*, 78–79.

¹⁶⁹ Corbier, "Coinage and Taxation", 367; Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 38. For further discussion on the *jugatio-capitatio* system, see Jones (1964, pp. 62–66), Goffart (1974, p. 31), Kuhoff (2001, pp. 484–514), Southern (2004, p. 159), Corcoran (2007, p. 49), Lo Cascio (2008, pp. 175–176), Potter (2013, p. 135), Mitchell (2015, p. 64).

¹⁷⁰ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 430.

As we have already mentioned, Diocletian deprived Italy of its special status so that it was administered like any other province. This included subjecting Italy to taxation (until then there had been no direct taxes here).¹⁷¹ However, Rome itself—including a 100-mile radius around the city—remained exempt from this obligation.¹⁷²

THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE FIRST TETRARCHY

Although they did not consider themselves deities, Diocletian and his colleagues in the tetrarchy were deeply wedded to the world of the gods. We have seen how they forged links with Jupiter and Hercules by giving themselves the names *Jovius* and *Herculius*. We can also distinguish how they laid claim to other aspects of divine veneration. Instead of the simple greeting (*salutatio*) given to previous emperors, kneeling and kissing the hem of the emperor's robe (*adoratio*) were now required.¹⁷³ Aurelius Victor also later claimed that Diocletian was the first emperor since Caligula and Domitian to have himself publicly addressed as “lord”, called a deity, and venerated as a god (*adorari se appellarique uti deum*).¹⁷⁴ To be sure, Caligula did indeed claim divine honours, and the full title *dominus et deus* (lord and god) first appears under Domitian, but the emperor Commodus also regarded himself as a god, and various emperors of the Principate period were addressed by the term “lord” (see Chapter 3). Most importantly, the introduction of the title *dominus et deus* in the third century was not Diocletian's idea: it had also been used by his predecessors Aurelian (at least on coins), Probus, and Carus.¹⁷⁵ In other words, by making this demand, Diocletian was simply falling into

¹⁷¹ Barnes (1982, p. 218) (“Before Diocletian, Italy was not a province of the Roman Empire and all its territory was exempt from provincial taxation.”). The *annona* was an exception in that Italy had always been subject to it (Elton 2018, p. 39).

¹⁷² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 159.

¹⁷³ Lo Cascio, “The emperor and his administration”, 172.

¹⁷⁴ Aur. Vict. 39, 2–4; cf. Eutr. IX, 26. Ammianus Marcellinus even attributed the introduction of the “foreign and royal mode of veneration” to Diocletian, cf. Amm. Mare. XV, 5, 18 (*Diocletianus enim Augustus omnium primus, externo et regio more instituit adorari, cum semper antea ad similitudinem iudicum salutatos principes legerimus*).

¹⁷⁵ Aurelian: Webb (1972a, p. 299); Probus: Webb (1972b, p. 109, 114), Carus: Webb (1972b, pp. 145–146).

line with a deep-seated trend. Diocletian himself was clearly a very pious man. A number of coins survive on which he and the other tetrarchs are depicted making sacrifices.¹⁷⁶ Bill Leadbetter recalls that the complex built to house Diocletian's "retirement" palace in Split included four temples; if Diocletian's faith had been skin-deep, surely one would have sufficed.¹⁷⁷

There was a long period during which Diocletian seemed not to mind Christians and pursued a positive religious policy that promoted traditional deities and effectively tolerated all cults. This tolerance had existed in the empire since 260, when Gallienus ended Valerian's persecution of Christians. In all this time, emperors and provincial governors alike essentially turned a blind eye to the fact that Christianity remained illegal.¹⁷⁸ As its numbers of followers grew, it became harder to ignore; in Nicomedia itself, where Diocletian resided for most of 303–305, a church was visible from the imperial palace. But Christianity and Diocletian's ideology were on a collision course. It was only a matter of time before the conservative Diocletian, who cherished tradition when it came to beliefs, would conclude that a religion which refused to conform posed a danger to the state. By the end of the third century, Diocletian had succeeded not only in securing the borders and establishing complete political control over the empire, but also in reorganising its civil and military administration and reforming the tax system and currency. In all of these activities, he was driven by a desire for unity, and the same can be said of his attitude towards Christianity. Like Decius and Valerian, he believed that religious conformity was essential in the empire if the favour of the gods was to be maintained. His 295 law against incest, the brief text of which is documented in the *Codex Justinianus*,¹⁷⁹ is often mentioned in this context.¹⁸⁰ The law itself is not of interest, but it was originally accompanied by a preamble that has been preserved in the late-4th-century *Collatio legum Mosaicarum et Romanarum*. Among

¹⁷⁶ E.g. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 351, 555, 578 *et al.*

¹⁷⁷ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 123.

¹⁷⁸ Barnes (1981, 147) observes that "Since 260, although technically still illegal, Christianity had enjoyed effective toleration from emperors and provincial governors".

¹⁷⁹ *CJ* V, 4, 17. Corcoran (20,007, 173–174) discusses this edict at length.

¹⁸⁰ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 73–74; Clarke, "Third-century Christianity", 649; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 122.

other things, that preface observes: “There can be no doubt that if we see all the inhabitants of our empire leading a proper, pious, peaceful and chaste life in every respect, even the immortal gods themselves will remain favourable and conciliatory towards the Roman state, as they have always been”.¹⁸¹ The devout monarch, who considered himself the father of all his subjects,¹⁸² felt ever more urgently that it was his duty to ensure that there was universal respect for the gods. Yet, the question remains as to why Diocletian did not resort to repression until 303. Stephenson interprets this simply as meaning that it was only after Diocletian had defeated Persia and introduced his reforms that he no longer had any serious enemy or major problem to contend with, and so he could begin his attempt to restore the “moral and spiritual health” of the empire and make “a fictive return to traditional Roman values”.¹⁸³ The fact that, relatively speaking, the empire’s largest concentration of Christians was in the East (especially in Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syro-Palestine) certainly played a role, and it was in these regions that we tend to find Diocletian in 296–305 (as we saw above, until then he had been focusing more on the Danube frontier).

The purge of the army that Diocletian ordered, probably as early as 297, in the context of the war with Persia and the revolt in Egypt acted as a sort of prelude to this persecution. The empire, experiencing an unexpected crisis, needed the support of the gods more than ever.¹⁸⁴ Lactantius explains that once, when a sacrifice had failed repeatedly, the priests were confused and ascribed it to the presence of unbelievers, i.e. Christians. Diocletian immediately ordered that everyone in the palace take an active part in the sacrifice or be scourged. Subsequently, all soldiers throughout the empire were obliged to participate in the sacrifice, and

¹⁸¹ *Collatio legum Mosaicarum et Romanarum* 6, 4 (*Ita enim et ipsos immortales deos Romano nomini, ut semper fuerant, faventes atque placatos futuros esse non dubium est, si cunctos sub imperio nostro agentes piam religiosamque et quietam et castam in omnibus mere colere perspexerimus vitam.*). Text taken from Hyamson (1913, p. 86).

¹⁸² Aur. Vict. 39, 29.

¹⁸³ Stephenson, *Constantine*, 103. Williams (2000, p. 170) agrees (“Preoccupation with other matters diverted imperial attention from the Christians throughout most of Diocletian’s rule”).

¹⁸⁴ This is the year and reason given by Leadbetter (2009, p. 129). Williams (2000, p. 171) dates the event to 298 or 299; Corcoran (2007, p. 52) says it was 299; Barnes (2014, p. 57) believes it was 300; Češka (2000, p. 41) puts it in 302.

those who did not obey were dismissed from the army.¹⁸⁵ The persecution of the adherents of Manichaeism in 302, on the other hand, was largely politically motivated, as Manicheans were thought to sympathise with Persia.¹⁸⁶

Diocletian spent the turn of 303 in Nicomedia with his *caesar* Galerius. According to Lactantius, they held one-on-one talks, spending the whole winter conferring whether or not to start persecuting Christians, with Galerius reportedly in favour of taking a hard line and Diocletian opposed.¹⁸⁷ Galerius' role in the Great Persecution is difficult to gauge. Lactantius portrays Galerius as a conniving, evil, brutal man to whom Diocletian slowly but surely submitted, eventually bending to his will.¹⁸⁸ And yet the final decision unquestionably lay with Diocletian. He went on to consult Apollo's oracle in Didyma (near Miletus in Asia Minor)¹⁸⁹ before finally giving his orders.

Early in the morning of 23 February 303, soldiers went to the church in Nicomedia and razed it to the ground.¹⁹⁰ The next day, the first edict against Christians was issued, resulting in the demolition of churches, the burning of Christian books, and the confiscation of property.¹⁹¹ The Christians, however, made do without churches, since the bishops were able to organise meetings and common prayer in the open air. This prompted a second edict, promulgated in the spring or summer of the same year, ordering the arrest of all bishops, though it does not seem to have applied to the West.¹⁹² Prisons in the Roman world were places

¹⁸⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 10, 2–4.

¹⁸⁶ Pohlsander, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 10; Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 51.

¹⁸⁷ Lact. *mort. pers.* 11, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Barnes (2014, p. 57) believes Lactantius' version, but Leadbetter (2009, p. 131) thinks he made it up. Williams (2000, p. 173) also concludes that it would be absurd for Galerius to have exercised any control over Diocletian. Clarke (2008, p. 650) points out that all we can say about this matter is that Lactantius, as an eyewitness to these events in Nicomedia, picked up on the rumours that were circulating at the time.

¹⁸⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 11, 7; Euseb. *HE* II, 50.

¹⁹⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 12. See Barnes (1981, p. 22), Pohlsander (2004, p. 11).

¹⁹¹ Stephenson (2010, p. 107) reminds us that there was no need for the first edict to spell out the death penalty for refusing to surrender books, since resisting any imperial edict automatically carried the risk of torture and death.

¹⁹² Clarke, “Third-century Christianity”, 653. Williams (2000, p. 179) also believes that only the first edict applied to the West.

where the accused awaited trial or sentencing; they were not intended for long-term confinement, and their limited capacity was probably insufficient for the sudden influx of many prisoners.¹⁹³ Consequently, later on in 303, a third edict was issued allowing those bishops who made sacrifices to be released. This edict, too, seems to have applied only to the East. Early in 304, there was a fourth edict ordering all of the empire's inhabitants, on pain of execution, to make sacrifices to the gods. As in the case of Decius' edict (see Chapter 3), many Christians presumably somehow avoided performing the sacrifice. Furthermore, despite the empire-wide nature of this edict, it was most likely not applied in practice in the West (and if it was, certainly not systematically).¹⁹⁴ The two Western tetrarchs took quite different stances: while Maximian tried hard to apply Diocletian's first edict within his sphere of power, and we know that executions went ahead in Africa, his *caesar* Constantius appears to have seen no reason why Christians should be actively persecuted and was thus very lax in carrying out the orders of the first edict. He did indeed have Christian churches demolished, but he did not have anyone executed for professing a different faith.¹⁹⁵

After the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305, acts of persecution gradually faded away. As we shall see, Galerius put a stop to this persecution for good at the end of April 311, only for Maximinus Daia to resume it six months later in the East (where it lasted from late 311 to the beginning of 313, as discussed in Chapter 7); hence, Diocletian's Great Persecution is usually framed by the years 303 and 313.¹⁹⁶ The most significant consequence that his persecution had was the later schism among Christians about how to deal with the *lapsi*, i.e. those Christians who had submitted to pressure and made sacrifices, and with the *traditores*, i.e. bishops who gave up sacred scriptures and objects during the persecution. As Constantine gradually took control of the entire empire

¹⁹³ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Clarke, "Third-century Christianity", 654.

¹⁹⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 15, 7. See Williams (2000, p. 179).

¹⁹⁶ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 80. For more information, see Češka (2000, pp. 40–45).

in 306–324, responsibility for religious matters within the empire would pass to him and he would intervene in these problems.¹⁹⁷

The following chapter describes, among other things, Diocletian's abdication (Diocletian's death will be dealt with in Appendix E); at this point, it would therefore be fitting to briefly review how he reigned and governed. Diocletian was a quite extraordinary figure in the history of the Roman Empire. In many respects, he was extremely talented (but it must also be said that in other ways he was mediocre and had his quite distinct weaknesses): he was able to recognise the needs of the empire and to find adequate solutions to serious and complex problems, and he was good at singling out collaborators suited to these tasks. His genius fully came to the fore in his political, under, military, and fiscal reform of the empire. In the East, Diocletian achieved considerable diplomatic success, although the credit here probably belongs more to his people—the same can be said of his codification of Roman law. As a military leader he was unexceptional, and his monetary reform was a valiant but not entirely successful attempt at rehabilitating the imperial currency. His Edict on Maximum Prices and his persecution of Christians were, in a word, calamitous—the former because it did not take into account the laws of the free market and the latter because it failed to consider people's compulsion to believe in gods of their own choosing. It is probably no coincidence that Diocletian's brilliant and successful ideas came to him in roughly the first 10 years of his reign, while the bad and unsuccessful ones tended to be in the last 5 years or so. Nevertheless, his abdication in 305 was one of his greatest achievements. And when he departed for his "retirement" palace in his native land, he left behind an empire in much better shape than he had found it 20 years earlier.

On the whole, Diocletian's 20 years of rule can also be summarised as having stabilised and elevated the empire economically and militarily to the point where it could afford to engage in internal wars over the next 20 years without collapsing or being looted by the enemy without.

¹⁹⁷ Corcoran, "Before Constantine", 53. For more on the problem of Donatism, see Chapter 7.

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Constantine's Life up to 306 CE

We can get an idea of Constantine's early life by carefully stitching together the various scraps of information thrown to us by our sources. As we shall see, the sources are often cryptic, contradict each other, and leave out crucial details. Our investigation is further complicated by the legend that ancient sources have built up for us about Constantine's origins, one that Constantine himself helped to engineer as early as the start of the fourth century by broadcasting his kinship with the emperor Claudius II, aka Claudius Gothicus (who reigned in 268–270). Full details of this supposed relationship can be found in Appendix A; suffice it to say at this point that all modern scholars dismiss any such link.

Constantine's mother Helena was of low birth; we will come back to her later. Constantine's father was the future emperor Constantius I. We do not know when he was born, nor can we be entirely sure where. Aurelius Victor says that Constantius, like other members of the original tetrarchy, came from Illyricum.¹ The trouble is, Illyricum is a sweeping term covering practically all of the northern Balkans. Can his birthplace be pinned down more precisely? The author of the *Historia Augusta* tells us

¹ Aur. Vict. 39, 26 (*Illyricum patria fuit*).

that Constantius' father Eutropius was "the noblest of the Dardanians".² Dardania was a small province occupying parts of what is now Serbia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Yet, why are we to believe this when the same writer then overplays his hand by asserting that Eutropius married a niece of the emperor Claudius Gothicus? Timothy Barnes, latching on to a small reference in a passage on Julian, has tried to show that Constantius' birthplace is more likely to have been in *Dacia Ripensis*, a small province on the Danube straddling present-day Bulgaria and Serbia; this hypothesis seems about right.³

Few sources tell us anything about Constantius' career before 1 March 293, when he was appointed a *caesar*. The *Origo* claims that he served first as a *protector*, then became a tribune, meaning that he was likely given command of his own troops, and was ultimately raised to the position of governor of Dalmatia, an area roughly corresponding to present-day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴ The title of *protector* raises questions mainly because it meant different things at different times (see Chapter 2). Gallienus created a body of *protectores* that seems to have been a select attachment of men whose job was to serve the emperor at close quarters and perform special duties.⁵ What we cannot be sure of is the emperor under whom Constantius served as *protector*, which emperor promoted him to tribune, and for which emperor he governed Dalmatia. It would also be interesting to know whether Constantius was named *protector* on merit, or whether his background played a role in his appointment. Alas, these questions are difficult to answer as we do

² HA, *Claud.* 13 (*Crispi f[am]ilia Claudia; ex ea et Eutropio, nobilissimo gentis Dardanae viro, Constantius Caesar est genitus*).

³ Barnes, *Constantine*, 30. Cf. Barnes (1981, p. 3), Syme (1983, p. 64). Julian (*Misopogon* 348c-d) actually says that he is from a region of Thrace sandwiched between the Thracians and the Paeonians, "on the very banks of the Ister [i.e. the Danube], among the Mysians, whence also comes my whole family, which is boorish, coarse, ungainly and insensitive".

⁴ *Origo* 1, 1 (*protector primum, inde tribunus, postea praeses Dalmatiarum fuit*).

⁵ This is how Jones (1964, p. 636) interprets the issue, but Campbell (2008, p. 119) believes that, at this early stage, the corps of *protectores* was only a privileged group of the emperor's favourites, while Potter (2004, p. 451) views it as a bodyguard ("a special guard unit attached to the emperor") and Southern (2004, p. 90) suggests that the *protectores* were set up as part of Gallienus' efforts to exclude senators from military leadership and create a new social pool of future army commanders ("it is possible that Gallienus was keen to establish a new kind of aristocracy of military men with proven ability").

not have enough information about Constantius' career. Barnes reconstructs his path as follows: assuming that Constantius was born around 250, he would have been serving Aurelian in the East as a *protector* in 271 or 272; he was then promoted to tribune, and in 284 or 285 he was governor of Dalmatia.⁶ Barnes here draws partly on the account provided by the *Historia Augusta*, a source that is hardly reliable and makes no attempt itself to piece together Constantius' career. In the biography of the emperor Probus (276–282), it merely notes that Probus is said to have “taught” future great military leaders and emperors, including Diocletian, Carus, and Constantius. Under the reign of the emperor Carus (282–283), Constantius, “who, as *praeses*, governed Dalmatia at the time”, was apparently held in such high esteem that Carus wanted to make him his successor instead of his own son Carinus.⁷ Barnes' reconstruction is made harder by his yearning for Constantius to be the ignoble man of low rank that would fit in with the narrative that he could have contracted a legal marriage with Helena around the time they met. As Barnes himself acknowledges, for a marriage to be considered proper and legal under Roman law, it had to be between two persons of equal or similar social status. If, therefore, Constantius held the rank of tribune when he made Helena's acquaintance (and if, moreover, he was of noble birth), they could not be lawfully wed; instead, they would have had to live together in a more informal arrangement. Barnes, however, categorically asserts that, at the time, Constantius was “a soldier of relatively humble birth” and that the marriage was legal.⁸ And then there is Drijvers, who may equally well be right in his judgement that Constantius was a member of provincial Dalmatian aristocracy.⁹ While there is no direct evidence for either claim, below we present arguments that lend credence more to Drijvers' hypothesis.

What is not in doubt is that Constantine's mother Helena was indeed of low birth. She was probably born in Drepanum, a city in the province of Bithynia in north-western Asia Minor, in perhaps 248 or 249.¹⁰

⁶ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 37.

⁷ *HA*, *Prob.* 22, 3 (*duces praeclarissimos instituit*); *HA*, *Car.* 17, 6 (*tunc autem praesidatum Dalmatiae administrabat*).

⁸ Barnes, *Constantine*, 34.

⁹ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 18.

¹⁰ Strangely enough, our information on Helena's birthplace comes from a single source—Procopius, who lived in the mid-sixth century (*Buildings* V, 2, 1), and even

She seems to have been so low-born that chroniclers from the time of Constantine's life are embarrassed to mention this fact, leaving the task instead to those who came after them. The most precise information we have comes from the bishop Ambrose's funeral oration for the emperor Theodosius in February 395. In the second half of his long speech, Ambrose touched on the fact that Theodosius would now meet his relatives in the afterlife, as well as the emperors Gratian and Constantine, and then devotes the next few paragraphs to Constantine's mother and her discovery of the True Cross.¹¹ He makes no bones about her origins: "It is said of her that she was originally a stable-maid (*stabularia*) and it was thus that she became acquainted with the elder Constantius, who later became emperor".¹² The term *stabularia* in itself does not necessarily mean that the future empress worked in actual stables; she could just as well have been employed in a wayside inn along one of the Roman roads, where the services offered to travellers included the stabling of their horses.¹³ Be that as it may, the bishop specifically refers to manure. He literally says that Helena preferred to be "regarded as manure" in order to gain Christ (here the bishop is evoking a verse in the Bible), and that Jesus "raised her from the manure" to rule (another biblical allusion).¹⁴ We will assume, then, that Helena's job was to tend to horses at a wayside inn. Ambrose's oration (which, incidentally, was delivered in Milan Cathedral before the aristocratic cream of the Western Roman Empire, including the young emperor Honorius) can be supplemented by other consistent sources. While the *Origo* discreetly observes that Constantine's mother was of the humblest possible birth, and Zosimus describes her origins as

he says he cannot be absolutely certain. On the other hand, Constantine incontrovertibly renamed Drepanum Helenopolis in honour of his mother, evidently shortly after her death, and probably did so because it was her birthplace. For another explanation, see Drijvers (1992, p. 12). As for the years of Helena's birth and death, Drijvers (1992, p. 15) narrows them down to 248/249 and 328/329.

¹¹ This discovery, these days considered nothing more than a legend (Pohlsander, 2004, p. 60), was said to have occurred during Helena's journey to the East (see Chapter 8).

¹² Ambros. *obit.* 42 (*stabulariam hanc primo fuisse asserunt, sic cognitam Constantio seniori, qui postea regnum adeptus est*). The bishop used the term "elder" here to distinguish Constantius I from his grandson Constantius II.

¹³ According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1813), the term *stabulum* (stable) can also have a negative meaning (brothel).

¹⁴ Ambros. *obit.* 42 (*maluit aestimari stercora [...] illam Christus de stercore levavit ad regnum*); see Philippians 3:8; Psalms 113: 7.

“unnoble”, Philostorgius quite candidly says that Constantine “was born of Helena, a common woman no different from a prostitute”.¹⁵ In any case, Helena’s social status was very low, and she appears to have lived her early life in virtual slavery, “very probably including sexual servitude”.¹⁶

We do not know where Constantine’s parents met, but it cannot have been in Helena’s hometown: Drepanum was on a spur of Asian land in the eastern part of the Sea of Marmara and lay off the Roman road from Nicomedia to Cyzicus. But they could have clapped eyes on each other somewhere on that road, perhaps in a wayside inn just a few miles south of Drepanum. The question is when. If Constantius, as a *protector* or tribune, was part of Aurelian’s entourage or mobile army during the campaign against Zenobia, the emperor might have sent him on a mission to secure the cities on the west coast of Asia Minor. Aurelian and his army were in the East in 272 and 273, and perhaps even at the end of 271.¹⁷ This means that Constantius and Helena would have had to meet in that time frame, since by 274 Aurelian was elsewhere, intent on destroying the “Gallic Empire”, and never returned to the East.¹⁸ There is every likelihood, then, that the Roman officer Flavius Constantius lodged in an inn in Bithynia during his tour of duty. As for the exact year, we shall come back to that in a while.

¹⁵ See *Origo* 2, 2; Philost. *HE* II, 16a; Zos. II, 8, 2; II, 9, 2. The standard English translation of Zosimus goes somewhat further than necessary on this point, calling Constantine the “son of a harlot” (see Ridley, 1982, p. 29).

¹⁶ This is how Drijvers (1992, p. 15) characterises her. Barnes (2014, pp. 30–33) on the other hand, sees Helena as the daughter of the owner of an imperial wayside inn (*mansio*) within the Roman courier system (*cursus publicus*). Admittedly, this is a possibility, but much less likely when we take into account information from other sources, which Barnes ignores. Potter (2013, p. 28) also claims, without offering any explanation, that Helena “most likely belonged to a respectable family from Drepanum”. Lenski (2007, p. 59) speaks for the majority when he says that “Constantine’s mother was hardly of noble stock”; Bowersock (1978, p. 21) also matter-of-factly refers to her as “the barmaid Helena”.

¹⁷ Barnes, *Constantine*, 35. Stoneman (1995, p. 165) has Aurelian travelling to the East as early as late 271; Potter (2004, p. 270) states that it was at the turn of 272; Southern (2004, p. 116)—without explanation—says 271.

¹⁸ In this context, Barnes (2014, p. 37) recalls a tomb inscription (*ILS* 2775) that mentions a certain *protector* of Aurelian named Claudius Herculanus, who lived to be 40 years old and was buried in Nicomedia by his brother Claudius Dionysius, also a *protector*. Barnes infers from this inscription that Constantius may have travelled through Bithynia in the company of these two brothers. This, however, is pure speculation.

Again, we must point out that we do not know when Constantius was elevated to tribune; it may have been as early as the beginning of Aurelian's reign, but also as late as the end. If the first possibility is true, this would have meant that the gulf in social status between Constantius and Helena was too great for them to marry properly. This is consistent with the testimony of most of our sources. According to Eutropius, Constantine was born "of a somewhat dubious marriage", and both Orosius and Jerome openly describe Helena as a concubine.¹⁹ Some other sources do use the term *uxor* (wife), but this can also be read more loosely, i.e. in the sense of "cohabiting partner".²⁰ Aurelius Victor is the only one to use the legal term *coniugium*, i.e. a legally contracted marriage, when he casually mentions that, following their elevation to *caesares*, Constantius and Galerius had to annul their previous marriages (*diremptis prioribus coniugiis*).²¹ However, as we saw in Chapter 3, Galerius too probably lived with a concubine or concubines before he was made *caesar*. To this we might add an inscription from Italy which, although it refers to Helena as Constantius' lawful wife, was not made until 325 (or 326). Furthermore, its devotional tone precludes sincerity.²² The inescapable conclusion is that Helena was very likely Constantius' concubine, but never his wife in a legal sense.²³ They appear to have met in the early 270s, when Constantius was serving as Aurelian's *protector*. What do our sources have to say about the year of Constantine's birth?

Socrates Scholasticus says that Constantine, seized with illness when he had just turned 65, left Constantinople and set off with his court for

¹⁹ Eutr. X, 2 (*ex obscuriore matrimonio*); Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 16 (*Constantinum filium ex concubina Helena creatum*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 306 (*filius eius Constantinus ex concubina Helena procreatus*).

²⁰ *Origo* 1, 1; Eutr. IX, 22. Importantly in this regard, some sources use both terms—*uxor* and *concubina*—for Helena interchangeably (e.g. Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 292 and 306). Zonaras (XIII, 1, 1) noted this discrepancy in the sources and presented both possibilities.

²¹ Aur. Vict. 39, 25. For the sequence of these acts, see below.

²² *ILS* 708 (*dominae nostrae Flaviae Augustae Helenae divi Constanti castissimae coniugi, procreatrici domini nostri Constantini maximi piissimi ac victoris Augusti* etc.).

²³ Although Barnes (1982, p. 36) has argued strongly that Helena should be seen as Constantius' legally wedded wife, and despite the fact that some support this view (Odahl, 2013, p. 16; Potter, 2013, p. 28), most scholars consider Helena to have been Constantius' concubine; see Drijvers (1992, p. 17); Pohlsander (2004, p. 14); Češka (2000, p. 34); Clauss (1996, p. 19). Others are non-committal (Lenski, 2007, p. 59; Southern, 2004, p. 147).

his mother's hometown (which, as we have seen, he had renamed Heleopolis) to take the waters there. However, as his illness worsened along the way, he decided he continue on to Nicomedia. He got no further than the fringes of the city, where he made his will, had himself baptised, and made other necessary arrangements. A few days later, he was dead. It all happened so quickly that none of his sons, scattered across the empire, was able to reach his deathbed in time.²⁴ According to Socrates, then, Constantine was born in 272. Socrates also provides us with a very important fact: Constantine died on 22 May. This is corroborated by the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*.²⁵ Eusebius adds further details: he says that Constantine died on the feast of Pentecost, i.e. seven weeks after Easter, and elsewhere he notes that Constantine fell ill at Easter.²⁶ In 337, Easter Sunday fell on 3 April, and Pentecost really was on 22 May.²⁷ Of course, Socrates should not be taken too literally. If we were to infer from his statement that the emperor celebrated his birthday sometime at the end of March or beginning of April, we would be sorely mistaken. In fact, we have sources that give the exact day (though not the year) of Constantine's birth as 27 February.²⁸ It looks like we have arrived at our destination: Constantine was born on 27 February 272.

Socrates goes on to add that Constantine reigned for 31 years; as Constantine seized power on 25 July 306 and died on 22 May 337, he was indeed in the (incomplete) thirty-first year of his reign.²⁹ The facts provided by Socrates, supported by information from Eusebius, are both detailed and consistent, and should therefore be accepted in good faith. Moreover, Eusebius observes that the emperor died in the thirty-second year of his reign (though, as we have seen, this is not precise) and that he lived to be about twice that age.³⁰ As Eusebius himself concedes that his

²⁴ Socr. *HE* I, 39. These details of Constantine's journey tally with Eusebius, *VC* IV, 61.

²⁵ Socr. *HE* I, 40; *Cons. Const.* s. a. 337 (*Constantinus Augustus ad caelestia regna ablatu est die XI kl. Iun.*).

²⁶ Euseb. *VC* IV, 64, 1-2; *VC* IV, 61, 1.

²⁷ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 82-83; Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 291.

²⁸ *Chron.* 354 and Polemius Silvius in his *Laterculum* (both in Mommsen, 1863, pp. 336-337) say that this was *natalis Constantini*.

²⁹ Socr. *HE* I, 40.

³⁰ Euseb. *VC* IV, 53.

information that Constantine lived to be 64 years old is only an approximation, we too shall regard it as such. Elsewhere, Eusebius remarks that “our emperor began from that (age) when Alexander of Macedon died, and doubled in time the length of his life”.³¹ That would mean that Constantine began his reign at the age of 32 and that he lived to be 64. This is consistent with Eusebius’ previous statement that he presented as an approximation, so we will consider this information on Constantine’s age at the time he took to the throne and upon his death as approximate, too. In other words, Eusebius has no intention of committing himself to specific figures and therefore disqualifies himself as an important witness. Sozomen, one of Eusebius’ successors in writing the *Ecclesiastical History*, confirms this version of Constantine’s last days without any deviation whatsoever: he sticks to the line that Constantine died at the age of 65 in the thirty-first year of his reign.³²

On the face of it, Eutropius and Jerome seem to deviate from this account of Constantine’s age at death when they agree that he was 66, suggesting a birth year of 271; Eutropius, moreover, mentions that he died in the thirty-first year of his reign. However, the phrasing used by both admits of the translation that the emperor died in the *unfinished* sixty-sixth year of his age, which coincides with Socrates, and in the *unfinished* thirty-first year of his reign, which, as we have seen, is quite correct.³³

Aurelius Victor, however, strays quite a way from this approximate consensus, claiming that Constantine ruled over the whole world for 13 years and that he died in the thirty-second year of his reign at the age of 62; this would make his birth year 275.³⁴ As we have seen, the length of Constantine’s reign cited here is incorrect, and he was an autocrat for only 12 years and 8 months (from 18 September 324 to 22 May 337); if these facts are wrong, the age given for his age at death can only invite suspicion, too.³⁵ The *Epitome de Caesaribus* sows even more

³¹ Euseb. *VC* I, 8, 1.

³² Soz. *HE* II, 34, 3.

³³ Eutr. X, 8 (*uno et tricesimo anno imperii, aetatis sexto et sexagesimo*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 337 (*moritur anno aetatis LXVI*).

³⁴ Aur. Vict. 41, 16 (*ita anno imperii tricesimo secundoque, cum totum orbem tredecim tenuisset, sexaginta natus atque amplius duo [...] excessit*).

³⁵ Bird (1993, pp. 156–157) points out that both Eutropius and Aurelius Victor seem to have followed the same tradition here (probably the *Kaisergeschichte*), as each mentions

confusion by stating that Constantine lived to be 63 and that he ruled alone for 13 years.³⁶ While the duration of the autocracy is erroneous, at least it is consistent with Victor, on whose account the *Epitome* seems to be drawing here. But if that is so, how come it differs from Victor in the number of years the emperor lived? And that is not all. The *Epitome* also gives us the sum of years that Constantine reigned, but twice and each time differently: first, it says that Constantine reigned for 30 years, yet elsewhere, in assessing his reign, it asserts that he reigned for “10 years well, 12 more as a villain, and the last 10 as a ward in need of supervision”.³⁷

Philostorgius is no use to us here because all he does is briefly, and wrongly, state that Constantine died just as the thirty-second year of his reign was beginning.³⁸ Theodoret only mentions Athanasius' first exile, when he was banished in the thirtieth year of Constantine's reign (336), noting that the emperor fell ill a year and a few months afterwards, i.e. in the thirty-first year of his reign.³⁹ But he does not give Constantine's age at the time of his death either.

Summing up the sources we have covered so far, we find that Socrates and Sozomen provide the crispest details; Eusebius, on the other hand, is rather vague, but essentially confirms their version. Eutropius and Jerome, as we have seen, seem divided over Constantine's age at death, while Philostorgius and Theodoret make not the slightest mention of it. The only sources that really throw up questions are Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome*, but their credibility is undermined by their confusion over the details. The conclusion we drew earlier still stands: Constantine was born on 27 February 272.

That is not to say that our search for the year of Constantine's birth ends there. We need to look at a few other testimonies which promise to shed more light on the chronology of Constantine's life and which ostensibly have the advantage of being contemporary. Our first witness

that Constantine's death was announced by the appearance of a comet, and both agree that the emperor died when he was preparing to go to war with Persia. Philostorgius (*HE* II, 16a) also speaks of a comet.

³⁶ *Epitome* 41, 15 (*tres et sexaginta annos vixisset [...] tredecim solus imperaret*).

³⁷ *Epitome* 41, 2 (*imperavit annos triginta*); 41, 16 (*decem annis praestantissimus, duodecim sequentibus latro, decem novissimis pupillus ob profusiones immodicas nominatus*).

³⁸ Philost. *HE* II, 16.

³⁹ Theod. *HE* I, 31–32.

is Eusebius himself. In his biography of Constantine, he quotes a letter in which the emperor recalls the year 303, when Diocletian ordered the persecution of Christians. In it, Constantine says that he was still a boy—or a young man—at the time.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Eusebius testifies to the fact that both Diocletian and Galerius were present in Nicomedia at the time of the first edict (23 February 303).⁴¹ Indeed, Constantine himself discloses that he experienced the beginning of the persecution of Christians at Diocletian’s court.⁴² What could he—just a young officer at court back then—have done to stop the persecution? In his later years, Constantine may not have been “proud of the man he had been in 303”,⁴³ so it would have been very convenient for him, when he was older, to shave his true age, because this would mean he could not have been guilty of, nor played any part in, the persecution of Christians. The same purpose was served by Eusebius’ claim to have seen with his own eyes the young Constantine accompany Diocletian in 301 or 302 on his journey through Palestine; the bishop described the 30-year-old Constantine as a man who “had passed from the age of childhood to the age of youth”.⁴⁴ Julius Firmicus Maternus, a younger contemporary of Constantine (and incidentally, as a *vir clarissimus*, part of the new Constantinian social establishment), briefly mentions two significant details in his work on astrology: Constantine’s birthplace, to which we shall turn our attention shortly, and the strange fact that Constantine came to rule at a very young age.⁴⁵ Needless to say, like Eusebius, he showers the emperor in praise.

Lactantius, Constantine’s contemporary (and tutor of his son Crispus), is no help. Not only does he studiously avoid specifying Constantine’s

⁴⁰ Euseb. *VC* II, 51.

⁴¹ Euseb. *HE* VIII, 5.

⁴² *Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum* 25. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 18, 10) also tells us that, by 305, Constantine had been present at the imperial court for some time (*iam pridem*).

⁴³ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 95.

⁴⁴ Euseb. *VC* I, 19; for more on the date, see Barnes, 2014, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Mater. I, 10, 13 (*apud Naissum genitus a primo aetatis gradu imperii gubernacula retinens*).

age, but he always stereotypically projects him as a “youth” or “young man”, no matter whether he is describing events in 305, 306, or 310.⁴⁶

Finally, there are the panegyric writers, whose very remit was to laud their benefactors. A panegyric from 307 depicts Constantine as a man still young in years—the panegyrist even refers to the emperor as the “young emperor” at one point, comparing him favourably with Scipio the Elder and Pompey, who also began their careers at a tender age.⁴⁷ Nazarius’ panegyric of 321, on the other hand, gets straight to the point, stating that Constantine was “yet of an unripe age but already ripe to rule” when he took power in 306.⁴⁸

When it comes to Constantine’s age, the above two accounts drawn up by Eusebius, the testimonies provided by Maternus and Lactantius, and the posturing of both panegyrics have been aptly described by Timothy Barnes as “official lies”. In fact, Barnes believes that these lies were fabricated by none other than Constantine, who had them peddled for political gain (much like his invented genealogy).⁴⁹ Yet, it is precisely these staid-looking data that led some scholars to conclude that Constantine was born in the 280s, even though it has been some 40 years since Timothy Barnes convincingly demonstrated that Constantine must have been born in the early 270s; he himself went with the year 273.⁵⁰ To be fair, most scholars nowadays lean more towards the 271–277 range, with 272 and 273 being touted most commonly, but the view that the emperor was born in the 280s still creeps in occasionally.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 10 (the year 305: *adulescens*); 24, 4 (the year 306: *iuvenis*); 29, 5 (the year 310: *adulescens*).

⁴⁷ *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 5, 3 (*imperator adulescens*).

⁴⁸ *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 16, 4 (*tu, imperator optime, inito principatu, adhuc aevi immaturus sed iam maturus imperio*).

⁴⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 2–3.

⁵⁰ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 39; Barnes, *Constantine*, 2–3.

⁵¹ While Barnes (2014, p. 38) unshakeably concluded that Constantine was born on 27 February 273, other scholars are not so sure. Lenski (2007, p. 59) is more inclined towards 272, Odahl (2013, p. 16) and Mitchell (2015, p. 66) reckon it was “around 273”, and Elliott (1996, p. 17), Girardet (2010, p. 26), Drijvers (1992, p. 14), and Kienast (1996, p. 298) cannot decide between 272 and 273. Pohlsander (2004, p. 14) very cautiously places Constantine’s birth in the 271–277 range. Potter (2013, p. 28) is now something of an outlier, deducing that it was probably 282. Older literature (e.g. Syme, 1983, p. 63; Jones, 1972, p. 17) also tends towards the 280 s. The problem is not

We are left to ponder why Barnes chose the year 273 when, as we have seen, a core cluster of sources (Socrates, Sozomen, Eutropius, Jerome and, in effect, Eusebius) points to 272. Barnes reconstructed the dates of Aurelian's Eastern campaign and came to the conclusion we mentioned earlier, namely that Aurelian was in the East for two years, specifically in 272 and 273. Barnes assumes that Constantius belonged to Aurelian's corps of *protectores*, that he travelled with the emperor, and that he was present at the birth of his son in order to recognise him as his own; under these circumstances, according to Barnes, Constantius would have met Helena in the spring of 272, and his son would have been born on 27 February 273. But we could just as well suppose that Aurelian, stuck in the West, sent Constantius ahead in the first half of 271 to secure places of strategic importance in Asia Minor in advance—just as other men (perhaps the future emperor Probus) secured Egypt for Aurelian in August 271.⁵² This would also explain why Constantius—perhaps with only a modest retinue—stayed at the inn. Thus, after Constantius met Helena here, Constantine could have been born on 27 February 272. This is not only within the realms of possibility, but is actually likely and fits better with what our sources say about the date of Constantine's birth.

We cannot round off our discussion on Constantius' subsequent career without addressing the year of his birth. It is rather a coincidence that, as with his son Constantine, we know only the day of his birth.⁵³ According to Barnes, Constantius was born no later than 250, while Leadbetter leans towards a year of about 243⁵⁴; the fact of the matter is that Constantius may have been born as early as around 240. The evidence, needless to say, is only circumstantial. One argument works on the assumption that Constantius was busy performing important duties in Asia Minor in 271 and 272; such a commission would have been entrusted to a 30-year-old rather than a 20-year-old. Further, if the *Historia Augusta* is correct—and in this case there is no reason to dispute it—Constantius was governor of Dalmatia during the reign of Carus. The emperor would have been

addressed by Drake (2000, p. 156), who simply gives a range of 270–280. Claus (1996, p. 19) refuses to take a stand at all, saying it could be anywhere between 270 and 288!

⁵² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 116.

⁵³ See *PLRE I*, 227, Constantius 12 (“his birthday was March 31, but the year is unknown”).

⁵⁴ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 35 (“no later than c. 250”); Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 64.

unlikely to choose anyone who was only about 30 years old for such an important position, especially if the man in question did not come from a distinguished family. Potter believes that, prior to the showdown between Carus' son Carinus and the new pretender to the throne, Diocletian, at the Battle of the Margus in the spring of 285, Constantius—as governor of Dalmatia—switched sides and joined Diocletian.⁵⁵ This makes sense, as Dalmatia would have hemmed in Carinus from the rear at the Margus and Constantius' decision may have swayed other important figures in the West. In any case, it is a known fact that, during the Battle of the Margus itself, Carinus' praetorian prefect Aristobulus defected. Diocletian rewarded him by confirming him in office as both praetorian prefect and consul, and Aristobulus would go on to hold other important positions.⁵⁶ Constantius, for his part, could now look forward to an even more illustrious career.

Constantine's birthplace was the city of Naissus (present-day Niš, Serbia)⁵⁷ in the province of *Dacia Mediterranea*. The *Origo* tells us that he was both born and bred there,⁵⁸ which is a significant detail because Pohlsander, for example, is certain that, after their first meeting, Helena followed Constantius as he moved around on military duty.⁵⁹ At the time of the fateful battle between Diocletian and Carinus at the Margus in the spring of 285, Constantine was 13 years old, and Naissus is near this river.

One question that has received scant attention from scholars, but is quite important, is what language Constantine actually spoke. Manfred Clauss argued that Constantine knew only Latin and had to use an interpreter in the East.⁶⁰ Admittedly, Eusebius testifies that the emperor was in the habit of composing his speeches himself, without the help of professional speech-writers, and that he always drafted these speeches in

⁵⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 280.

⁵⁶ *PLRE I*, 106, Aristobulus (*proconsul Africae* 290–294, *praefectus urbis Romae* 295–296).

⁵⁷ *Mater. I*, 10, 13 (*apud Naissum genitus*).

⁵⁸ *Origo* 2, 2 (*natus [...] in oppido Naisso atque eductus*).

⁵⁹ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 14.

⁶⁰ Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 20. Edwards (2003, p. xxvi) also concludes that Constantine was unable to use any language other than Latin, at least when he wanted to communicate formally.

Latin. They were then translated into Greek by the professional translators retained by the emperor at court for this purpose.⁶¹ On the other hand, Eusebius also says that, at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine spoke kindly to the bishops in Greek.⁶² Constantine's mother, as a native Bithynian, probably spoke Greek. As for his father Constantius, born in the northern Balkans, there is little question that he spoke Latin. For that matter, Constantine himself came from this region. Barnes may be right when he says that Constantine "certainly spoke Greek",⁶³ but only if he means vernacular, spoken, non-literary Greek. Constantine arguably learnt it both from his mother and during his service in the East in 293–305. However, the main language in which the emperor expressed himself, especially in writing, was Latin.

Whatever the nature of the union between Helena and Constantius, it unquestionably ended no later than 293, when Constantius became a *caesar* and married Maximian's daughter Theodora. Our sources link these two events and say that they occurred practically simultaneously, or, rather, that the dissolution of the previous union was a condition not only for the new marriage but also for the assumption of the title of *caesar*.⁶⁴ This is perfectly logical, and it would be entirely unnecessary to assert, as some scholars do, that Constantius had married Theodora several years earlier.⁶⁵ Their claim is based on a hint in a single source that does not even name Constantius. The orator Mamertinus, in the panegyric on Maximian he appears to have delivered in Trier on 21 April 289, tells the emperor that the men who held "the most powerful office" in his retinue were bound to him by the bonds of friendship and kinship.⁶⁶ Since that

⁶¹ Euseb. *VC* IV, 32.

⁶² Euseb. *VC* III, 13, 2.

⁶³ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 73. Consider also Lenski (2007, p. 60) ("a capable if not fluent speaker of Greek") and Van Dam (2008, p. 194).

⁶⁴ *Origo* 1, 1; Aur. Vict. 39, 25; Eutr. IX, 22, 1; Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 292; *Epitome* 39, 2.

⁶⁵ Barnes, *Constantine*, 40; Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 33; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 60; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 64. In contrast, Odahl (2013, p. 47) and Pohlsander (2004, p. 14) agree with the theory that the divorce and marriage occurred in 293.

⁶⁶ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 11, 4 (*Tu quidem certe, imperator, tantum esse in concordia bonum statuis, ut etiam eos qui circa te potissimo funguntur officio necessitudine tibi et adfinitate devinxeris, id pulcherrimum arbitratus adbaerere lateri tuo non timoris obsequia sed vota pietatis*).

“most powerful office” is obviously a nod to the praetorian prefects (it is hard to imagine otherwise), and because Constantius, as we saw in the previous chapter, was never Maximian’s praetorian prefect, we just have to accept that this passage refers to someone else. To be sure, after 285 it would have made sense for Maximian to surround himself with his relatives rather than people from the previous regime.⁶⁷ The trouble is that we do not know enough about Maximian’s family background. If, however, Asclepiodotus was Maximian’s prefect in 289—and even Barnes admits such a possibility⁶⁸ it could be argued, for example, that this is the person the author of the panegyric had in mind (and that Maximian perhaps gave Asclepiodotus his sister as a wife). Another candidate for kinship might be Pomponius Iuanarianus, a man we know was governor of Egypt in 284, then held a consulship with Maximian (!) in 288, before becoming urban prefect of Rome; in the meantime (e.g. in 285–286), he could well have been praetorian prefect.⁶⁹

Constantius had six children from his marriage to Theodora: three sons (Flavius Dalmatius, Julius Constantius, and Hannibalianus) and three daughters (Constantia, Anastasia, and Eutropia). We do not know the year of birth of any of these children, but they must all have been born after Constantius’ marriage to Theodora.

Regarding the year of Constantius’ divorce, besides the testimony of our sources there is also a psychological factor that tends to be overlooked, but may have played an important role. If Constantius divorced (or disowned) Helena in 288 or 289, Constantine would have been a 16- or 17-year-old youth still in need of both parents. And what did his father gain by breaking up the family? Not much: an unspecified rank or office on the other side of the world in the service of Maximian. If, on the other hand, this did not take place until 293, Constantius’ prize for renouncing Helena was his elevation to *caesar*, and his son would have been 21 years old by then.

When Constantius became *caesar* of the West, young Constantine, now the son of an emperor, was called to the East to serve Diocletian and Galerius. In 307, an anonymous orator made a solemn speech on

⁶⁷ As we have seen, Diocletian did use the services of Aristobulus, who had been praetorian prefect under the previous emperor, but this may have been out of momentary political necessity, with Aristobulus only serving Diocletian as prefect for a few years.

⁶⁸ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 137.

⁶⁹ *PLRE I*, 452–453 and 1047.

the occasion of Constantine's marriage to Maximian's daughter Fausta, in which he mentions that this marriage had been previously arranged by Maximian and Constantius; this account is confirmed by a later source.⁷⁰ The marriage must have been arranged well in advance, as Fausta is referred to as "the little one" (*parvula*). The orator describes to his audience a painting, said to be in the palace at Aquileia, in which Fausta hands the young Constantine a helmet inlaid with gold and jewels before his journey to the East.⁷¹ Between 293 and 296, Maximian was in Milan and Aquileia, where Fausta evidently grew up.⁷² If we accept the reasonable view that Fausta was born around 290,⁷³ she may have been 17 years old at the time of her marriage and could have been promised to Constantine as early as 293, the year in which Constantine appears to have been sent to the East to join Diocletian's court.⁷⁴

If Constantine went to the East as early as 293, at the age of 21, it was to be near Diocletian or Galerius as their hostage (*obses*); the *Origo*⁷⁵ is very clear about this, and Aurelius Victor⁷⁶ and the *Epitome* make similar statements (although the latter erroneously says that Constantine was held hostage by Galerius in Rome).⁷⁷ Those Constantinian historians who believe that Constantine was predestined for imperial power just

⁷⁰ *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 7, 1 (*et profecto hoc iam tunc, Maximiane, divina mente prae-sumpseras, hoc, cum ferret aetas, ut rogareris optaveras, cum tibi in illa iocundissima sede lactitiae harum nuptiarum gaudia praedestinabas, ut simul illam parvulam et hunc intuendo crescentem diu fruereis expectatione voti quod hac coniunctione firmasti*). That Maximian and Constantius agreed on the marriage of Constantine and Fausta is confirmed by Julian (*Oratio* I, 7 D).

⁷¹ *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 6, 1–2. See Barnes (1981, p. 9).

⁷² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 59.

⁷³ Barnes, *Constantine*, 56. See also Kienast (1996, p. 305).

⁷⁴ Odahl (2013, p. 72) and Barnes (2014, p. 56) assume that Constantine left for the East as early as the spring of 293.

⁷⁵ *Origo* 2, 2 (*obses apud Diocletianum et Galerium*). The term *obses* has no other meaning (see the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1222: *s.v.* "obses: a hostage"); no alternative is offered by the translations of the *Origo* into German (König, 1987, p. 35: "Geisel") and English (Lieu and Montserrat, 1996, p. 43: "a hostage").

⁷⁶ *Aur. Vict.* 40, 2 (*nam is a Galerio religionis specie ad vicem obsidis tenebatur*).

⁷⁷ *Epitome* 41, 2 (*hic dum iuvenculus a Galerio in urbe Roma religionis specie obses teneretur*). Praxagoras is the only one to obscure these reasons, saying that Constantius sent his son to Diocletian in Nicomedia so that he could be educated there.

ignore these facts.⁷⁸ Leadbetter is reluctant to translate *obses* as hostage, but he does note that Constantine was held at the Eastern court not to be groomed for rule, but because the two Eastern tetrarchs were simply abiding by the principle of “keeping one’s friends close and one’s potential political enemies even closer”.⁷⁹

We know that Constantine had a relationship with a woman named Minervina sometime before 307 CE. Three sources tell us that he had a son, Crispus, with her; they also agree that she was Constantine’s concubine.⁸⁰ Crispus was born around 300 and later proved to be a great help to his father’s reign. However, we have no further information about his mother; she does not appear on any coins, inscriptions, or artistic monuments. Nor do we know whether she died before 307 or whether Constantine abandoned her so that he could marry Fausta, the emperor Maximian’s daughter, in that year. We will discuss this marriage later.⁸¹

THE PROBLEM OF 305 CE

On 1 May 305, a ceremony was held near Nicomedia, the same place where Diocletian had once been proclaimed emperor. Lactantius describes it for us. Generals, soldiers serving at court, and representatives of distant

⁷⁸ Barnes has always argued that Constantine was destined to rule. See, for example, Barnes (1981, p. 28) (“long groomed for the throne”); Barnes (2014, p. 47) (“an heir presumptive to the imperial purple”).

⁷⁹ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 143.

⁸⁰ *Epitome* 41, 4 (*filiūque suū Crispum nomine, ex Minervina concubina susceptum*); Zos. II, 20; Zon. XIII, 2, 12–13. *Pan. Lat.* (VII [6], 4, 1) bucks the trend, praising the young Constantine in early adulthood for his responsible approach to marriage (using the terms *animum maritalem* and *iuvenis uxorius*), which would suggest a lawful marriage to Minervina; Pohlsander (1984, p. 80), however, rightly notes that it is not surprising that the author of the panegyric on Constantine refers to Constantine’s relationship with Minervina by the word marriage, even though their relationship did not merit such a term.

⁸¹ Some scholars—mostly without justifying themselves—view Minervina as a legitimate wife whom Constantine divorced (Jones, 1972, p. 69) or who died after Crispus’ birth (Barnes, 1981, p. 31; Odahl, 2013, p. 73). Potter (2013, pp. 97–98) gets carried away and comes up with a whole story to this effect: Minervina, he says, could have been from a respectable family in Antioch, married Constantine around 300, and bled to death at Crispus’ birth in 303! None of this can be proven, nor can Barnes’ hypothesis (2014, p. 49) that Minervina was a niece or other relative of Diocletian. Opinions on this matter are digested by Pohlsander (1984, p. 80); for more on Crispus, see Chapters 7 and 8.

legions were all invited to witness this solemn act in person and, in doing so, to lend it more *gravitas*. Diocletian, flanked by his *caesar* Galerius, made a speech in which he is said to have explained that old age and weariness prevented him from continuing in office; he wished to spend the rest of his life at peace and rest, and for this reason he was handing over power to his successor. Galerius became the new Eastern *augustus*, with Constantius set to be the new Western *augustus*. Diocletian took this opportunity to appoint two new *caesares*—Maximinus Daia for the East and Severus for the West.

Maximinus Daia, the son of Galerius' sister, shared the same origin and destiny as his uncle. In fact, he was even named after him—as we saw in the previous chapter, Maximinus appears to have been Galerius' original name.⁸² His career is described for us by Lactantius: “until recently, he herded cattle, but then he became a soldier, *protector*, tribune, and finally *caesar*”. Lactantius adds contemptuously that Daia was a half-barbarian (*semibarbarus*) who, on account of his youth, was skilled in neither soldiering nor statecraft.⁸³ Lactantius' use of the term “semi-barbarian” may indicate mixed Roman-Carpi descent—for example, if Galerius' sister had married a Carpus. We are guided down the same path by Lactantius' mention of the fact that, upon becoming emperor, Maximinus surrounded himself with barbarians who had previously been expelled from Dacia by the Goths; those “barbarians” are likely to have been Carpi (see the previous chapter). By contrast, both of Galerius' parents were evidently of Roman origin, as otherwise Lactantius would doubtless have jumped on such mixed ancestry. Even less is known about Severus—virtually all we can say is that, like Maximinus, he was from Illyricum, that he was of humble birth, that he was a friend and drinking

⁸² The name “Daia” does not crop up in most of our sources (the *Origo* and Eutropius refer to him simply as Maximinus). It is mentioned only by Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 18, 13) and the *Epitome* (40, 18), where it is rendered as “Daza” (cf. Barnes, 2014, p. 206). Some scholars thus refer to this emperor as Maximinus Daza (e.g. Williams, 2000, p. 191; Harries, 2012, p. 44; Leadbetter, 2009, p. 19), while others call him Maximinus Daia (e.g. Lenski, 2007, p. 60; Potter, 2013, p. 101; Češka, 2000, p. 52).

⁸³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 19, 6 (*nuper a pecoribus et silvis, statim scutarius, continuo protector, mox tribunus, postridie Caesar*); 18, 12 (*adulescentem quendam semibarbarum*).

companion of Galerius, and that before his appointment he had held some position of command in the army.⁸⁴

Diocletian took off his purple cloak when Maximinus came before the assembly and put it on the new *caesar*. At that moment, Diocletian became “the elder *augustus*, father of *augusti* and *caesares*” (*senior augustus, pater imperatorum et caesarum*).⁸⁵ The same ceremony took place on the same day in Milan in the presence of the abdicating Maximian, the new *augustus* Constantius, and the new *caesar* Severus. These details, reported to us by Lactantius, are not in doubt.⁸⁶ However, the problem is not what did or did not happen, but what—if Lactantius is to be believed—should have happened. Right from the start of the ceremony, he says, all eyes were on Constantine, who was present, because apparently no one was in any doubt that he was the one who was going to be proclaimed *caesar* of the East (*Constantinum omnes intuebantur. Nulla erat dubitatio*). After Diocletian announced the names of the new emperors, everyone is said to have been dumbfounded (*obstupescunt omnes*), wondering if perhaps there had been a mistake. Those modern scholars who are generally inclined to believe Lactantius, especially Timothy Barnes, infer that Constantine really was originally meant to be the Eastern *caesar*, in which case, by analogy, Maxentius was to have been the Western *caesar*. After all, both were the sons of reigning emperors, and both, according to Lactantius, had originally been nominated by Diocletian. Galerius, however, persuaded his lord, now reportedly weak of mind and body, to replace them with his own people, Severus and Maximinus.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Origo* 4, 9 (*ignobilis [...] ebriosus*); Aur. Vict. 40, 1 (*Severus Maximinusque Illyricorum indigenae*); Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 12 (*saltatorem temulentum ebriosum, cui nox pro die est et dies pro nocte [...] militibus fideliter praefuit*).

⁸⁵ *ILS* 646; Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 267. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 19, 5) even reports that “Diocletian reverted to Diocles” (*Diocles iterum factus est*), but this is not true because he kept the name Diocletian.

⁸⁶ See Lact. *mort. pers.* 19, 1–6. This account is accepted by modern scholars, including Barnes (1981, p. 26), Pohlsander (2004, p. 15), Potter (2013, p. 102), and Odahl (2013, p. 72).

⁸⁷ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 25–26; Barnes, *Constantine*, 56–60. Barnes is followed by Stephenson (2010, p. 116) and Odahl (2013, p. 71). The latter even argues that Galerius essentially coerced Diocletian into accepting his demands. Pohlsander (2004, p. 15) is rather more guarded, but he too points out the widespread expectation that one of the new *caesares* would be Constantine.

This hypothesis has a number of flaws (which we will explore in detail) and, more importantly, it is not held in high regard by historians. A more sensible approach is taken by Pat Southern, who points out that Lactantius was manifestly biased and that there is no way of knowing what Diocletian and Galerius discussed behind closed doors. Potter, for his part, notes that even the most Constantine-friendly sources—the panegyrics—are silent on his nomination, and that Constantine’s socially insignificant marriage (if it was a marriage at all) to Minerva did not mirror other marriages within the tetrarchy, which suggests that his career was not being engineered from above. Leadbetter, who dwells long and hard on the matter, adds that, at the time, Constantine was regarded as “an imperial bastard” who was not to be trusted in the slightest, which is why he was held hostage and was never given military command in the field, i.e. outside the court.⁸⁸ There is also the consideration that those scholars who place Constantine’s birth in the 280 s—such as the eminent British scholar A.H.M. Jones—argue that he was simply too young to be emperor in 305 and that Diocletian would hardly have entrusted power to an inexperienced young man of 20–25. Jones also believed that the tetrarchic principle was central to the decision-making of Diocletian and Galerius, since neither of these emperors had a son.⁸⁹

On top of all this, there are several other strange circumstances that Lactantius tries to sell the reader, making at least this part of his narrative unreliable. He describes how, after Diocletian’s recovery, Galerius visited the old emperor and put pressure on him to abdicate along with Maximian.⁹⁰ All other sources, on the other hand, emphasise (and praise) Diocletian’s initiative in this matter. Aurelius Victor says that Diocletian’s decision to abdicate was entirely his own, and that he did so under no duress and after much deliberation. The old emperor simply “celebrated

⁸⁸ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 152–153; Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 100–101; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 136–146, especially 142–143.

⁸⁹ Jones (1972, p. 66) observes that “it is likely that both Diocletian and Galerius, having no sons, disapproved of the hereditary principle, and not only was Maxentius a worthless young man, but Constantine was far too young. He had, it is true, been promoted a tribune—probably prematurely because he was his father’s son—and had seen a little active service on the Danube, but he had no experience”).

⁹⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 1–2. Lactantius’ version of events is dealt with best by Leadbetter (2009, p. 137), who observes that “This version is fraught with inconsistencies and illogicalities and is difficult to take seriously”.

the 20th anniversary of his reign and handed over the care of the state while he still had the strength to do so" (*celebrato regni vicesimo anno valentior curam reipublicae abiecit*).⁹¹ We have crucial testimony here from two panegyrics, one of which (from 307) speaks of a long-term plan that had been agreed in advance⁹²; the other (from 310) goes on to mention Maximian's pledge to Diocletian in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline that he would make no trouble and would abdicate with him.⁹³ Although it is not said when this pledge was made, the most likely date would appear to be the celebration of Diocletian's *vicennalia* in Rome in November 303.⁹⁴

Lactantius also tells us that Diocletian raised strange objections to abdication in his conversation with Galerius (the old emperor reportedly argued that retiring would be personally dangerous for him because of the existence of political enemies). What makes this particularly strange is that Diocletian had had a palace built for his retirement in present-day Split (see the previous chapter), so he had clearly worked out his retirement plans some time before his abdication and certainly had no intention of dying in office.

Lactantius' depiction of Diocletian as a sickly old man close to death—infirm, confused and weepy—is also questionable.⁹⁵ Diocletian lived for at least six—and probably eight—more years after his abdication. Besides, no one would have invited him to the conference at Carnuntum in 308 unless he was still in possession of his mental faculties and able to travel. Nor would anyone have offered him the emperorship! It was at this conference that Diocletian firmly spurned overtures of a return to imperial rule, preferring instead to repair to Split so that he could get back to sowing and growing his own vegetables.⁹⁶

Finally, a question mark hangs over secrecy and how news about the emperors' talks would have spread. How could those present at the

⁹¹ Aur. Vict. 39, 48. Similar accounts are provided by Eutr. IX, 27; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 14; *Epitome* 39, 5; *Origo* 2, 2; Zos. II, 7.

⁹² See *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 9, 2.

⁹³ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 15, 4.

⁹⁴ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 203.

⁹⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 17, 9 (*demens factus est*); 18, 7 (*senex languidus [...] lacrimabundus*); 19, 3 (*senex cum lacrimis*).

⁹⁶ This really is the reason cited in the *Epitome* (39, 6). Those readers who make it to Chapter 6 will learn more about the Conference of Carnuntum (and the vegetables).

military gathering have known in advance which candidates would be declared *caesares*? Or rather, if the name of Constantine (and presumably Maxentius) was known in advance from previous deliberations, how is it that the subsequent switch to Maximinus and Severus was not also common knowledge and that their appointment raised eyebrows? Did Diocletian, after his first meeting with Galerius, discover and plug a security leak revealing that Constantine had been chosen? To be blunt, this is absurd.

Arguably, assuming no information about Constantine's nomination from the previous talks had got out, there is the consideration that Constantine was simply so popular with the entire Eastern army that everyone wanted and anticipated his appointment. Indeed, that is the idea foisted on us by Lactantius. How plausible is it? Lactantius himself states that Constantine was a "tribune of the first order"⁹⁷ at this time, yet the very way this rank is worded is unusual.⁹⁸ Undocumented anywhere else, it is a rank that perhaps reflects the many years that Constantine had been part of Diocletian's court. Lactantius does not tell us that he was there as a hostage, but other sources do, as we have seen above.

In 305, aged about 30, Constantine may have enjoyed greater prestige and a higher salary than a regular officer of the same rank in the Eastern army, but that does not mean that he bore much responsibility. While it is possible that, as a tribune at the court, he commanded a unit of the *scholae palatinae*, it is more likely that, as a hostage, he was made an "unassigned tribune" (*tribunus vacans*). He may have served, for example, as a staff officer without direct responsibility for specific soldiers. Sadly, no sources, even those that are very favourable to Constantine, shed further light on his career here. The *Origo* does not even mention any rank—Constantine was simply nothing more than a "hostage" and was initially said to have fought in the cavalry, evidently in some lower position. Eusebius accentuates his privileged status by noting that he rode at Diocletian's right hand

⁹⁷ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 10 (*eratque tunc praesens iam pridem a Diocletiano factus tribunus ordinis primi*).

⁹⁸ Jones (1964, p. 640) observes that "We are told by Lactantius that Constantine attained the rank of *tribunus ordinis primi* in the *comitatus* of Diocletian. There is no later reference to tribunates being officially graded, but they obviously differed very greatly in importance according to the unit involved". A later panegyric fleetingly mentions the early days of Constantine's military career, and even uses the plural *tribunates*—it very vaguely states that Constantine began "his military career acting as important *tribunates*" (*Pan. Lat.* VII [6], 5, 3: *cum per maximos tribunatus stipendia prima conficeret*).

in Palestine, probably in 298, but does not mention his rank or suggest any real authority.⁹⁹

The Eastern army at this time numbered some quarter of a million men (see Appendix C). Lactantius says that the assembly was attended by soldiers (*militēs*)—in all probability troops convened from Diocletian's *comitatus*—and *primores militum electi et acciti ex legionibus*, or selected soldiers from other units who had been called to the event as delegates.¹⁰⁰ If, as Lactantius claims, everyone wanted staff officer Constantine to be appointed *caesar*, he must have had a fan club running the length and breadth of the Roman East. Or, Lactantius is lying.

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⁹⁹ *Origo* 2, 2–3; Euseb. *VC* I, 19. For the chronology of Constantine's time at Diocletian's court, see Barnes (2014, pp. 51–52).

¹⁰⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 19, 1.

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Britain

When Constantius took control of the West of the empire as its new *augustus* on 1 May 305, there was probably little change in his day-to-day duties; he simply added Hispania to the territories he was already running (i.e. Gaul and Britain), while his *caesar* Severus was in charge of Italy and Africa. The new Eastern *augustus* Galerius, who, as we have seen, had spent the previous five years or so in the Danube region, added Asia Minor to his sphere of control; his *caesar* Maximinus was assigned the rest of the East.¹

Of all his territories, Constantius—despite his ill health—concentrated most on Britain. He appears to have left Milan for Britain, never to return to the continent, soon after his elevation to *augustus*. Bill Leadbetter rightly asks why Constantius personally waged war in Britain when he was not in the best of health, especially considering that he had a deputy, the *caesar* Severus, who could have seen to this campaign for him while he himself remained in Milan or repaired to Trier. Leadbetter explains that Constantius was probably intent on playing a hands-on role in completing his mission of securing Roman Britain firmly against its enemies; the deposition of the usurper Allectus in 296 had just been the beginning. Back then, Allectus, evidently acting in anticipation of an offensive by

¹ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 197.

Constantius, had withdrawn his garrisons from Hadrian's Wall, leaving Britain poorly protected from the north. The immediate job in hand was to secure the frontier, restore the neglected defensive infrastructure, and strike a coordinated naval and land operation against the Picts to remind them of the Romans' presence and determination to defend this territory.²

It is hard to avoid drawing comparisons with the campaign that Septimius Severus had previously mounted in Britain for similar reasons (see Chapter 3). Both Constantius and Severus took their sons with them to war, and both died in York (then Eboracum).³ Constantius probably made his way as deeply into the territory of the northern tribes as Severus had done, though his aims were more modest (he was here not to conquer the rest of the island, but simply to secure Hadrian's Wall) and his campaign was shorter (he was done in 305).⁴ Constantius, like Septimius Severus, may have suspected that he would not return from the island; indeed, he died there in 306. Lactantius tells us a fictional story to this effect. Constantius, gravely ill, prevailed upon his Eastern colleague Galerius to release his son so that he could see him (Constantine, as we have seen, was all but a hostage at the Eastern court). Galerius was initially reluctant to accede to the request as he had no wish to release Constantine; in fact, he had been plotting to kill Constantine for some time (Lactantius' assertions here contradict each other). When he finally gave permission for Constantine to go, he actually had no intention of letting him leave. He ordered him to wait until morning for further instructions, when in reality he planned to think up some pretext to detain him. However, Constantine, who was said to be protected by the Christian god, used his guile and physical strength to avoid and overcome the traps that had been laid to snare him, fled the palace, took all the horses at the way stations (*mutationes* and *mansiones*) of the imperial courier service (*cursus publicus*) so that no one could catch up with him, and arrived

² Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 158. Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 227) take a different view, arguing that Constantius' campaign in 305 may not have been linked at all to events following the dismantling of Allectus' empire; instead, Constantius perhaps undertook such an arbitrary war simply for the sake of covering himself in military glory.

³ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 170.

⁴ Sometime before 7 January 306, the title *Britannicus maximus* was bestowed on Constantius (Leadbetter, 2009, 160). Archaeological evidence points to a Roman presence in Dumfriesshire in southern Scotland at this time (Barnes, 2014, 62).

astonishingly soon in Britain, where he had the good fortune to catch his father before his death.⁵

There is one flaw in Lactantius' story: Constantine got together with his father not when Constantius was on his deathbed in July 306, but in 305, probably shortly after the appointment of the new *augusti*. In other words, they were reunited much earlier: after Constantius arrived in Bononia (present-day Boulogne-sur-Mer, France), where his father had been expecting him, they sailed together to Britain, and there father and son waged war against the northern tribes.⁶

The fact of the matter is that everything changed on that first day of May in 305 when Constantius became a senior emperor: at a stroke, Constantine, the hostage held in the East by Diocletian and Galerius, became the son of the ruling *augustus* of the West. With Constantius having to be recognised as the dominant member of this second tetrarchy's imperial college, Galerius immediately forfeited the right to detain Constantine at his court any longer. Now free to travel, Constantine set off for the West. According to Barnes, he took with him his mother Helena and his son Crispus, who by then must have been about five years old⁷; we know nothing of the fate of his concubine Minervina, and it would be pointless to speculate what became of her. Helena and Crispus also disappear from the chronicles for quite a while. If they were with Constantine, they played no part (at least that we know of) in what happened next. We are even kept in the dark about Constantine's relationship with his father during the months he spent with him in Britain.

⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 24. Other sources present their own versions of this escape. According to Aurelius Victor (40, 2–4), the *Origo* (2, 4), and the *Epitome* (41, 2–3), Constantine slaughtered the horses; Zosimus (II, 8) says he hobbled them. Zosimus and Victor make no mention of any scheming by Galerius; reporting only that it was Constantine's unbridled lust for power that spurred him on his way to Constantius. The *Epitome* says that Constantine simply wanted to escape so that he would no longer be held hostage.

⁶ *Origo* 2, 4; *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 7, 5. Modern scholars vary in how willing they are to accept Lactantius' account of these events. Barnes (2014, 61–62) and Potter (2013, 110–112) are the most critical of his reporting, Lenski (2007b, 61) and Pohlsander (2004, 15) less so. Even Lactantius' kindest critic, Odahl (2013, 77), acknowledges that Constantine met his father in the summer of 305, not a year later. Potter rightly points out that it was important for the Constantinian propaganda we can see at work here to stress that Constantine did not reach his dying father in Britain until he was breathing his last, as this would mean that he had no time to plan the usurpation; what occurred on 25 July 306 was intended to look like a spontaneous act (see below).

⁷ Barnes, *Constantine*, 61–62.

What came about at the end of this episode can be summed up in a single sentence: when the ailing Constantius I died in York on 25 July 306, his son Constantine was named emperor on the very same day in the very same place.

What exactly happened that day? By its very geography, Britain—a far-flung province (in point of fact, a cluster of provinces) on an extreme edge of the empire—was always going to be a territory at risk of being severed from the central government in times of imperial crisis. We might call it an incubator of usurpers.⁸ Was Constantine one of them? As ever, if we are to arrive at a sensible conclusion, we must analyse all available accounts of the event assiduously and dispassionately. Chronologically, the first documentary evidence we have is an anonymous panegyric of 307 (see Appendix B), in which the panegyrist, when reviewing the events of the previous year, turns to Constantine and says that “when your father left you the imperial government, you preferred to content yourself with the title of *caesar*, expecting that he who had declared your father *augustus* would declare you so, too”.⁹ The panegyrist then explains that, although Constantine could have claimed the title of *augustus* “by right of succession”, he preferred to receive it from Galerius on the grounds that he had earned it “on his own merits” (*si id non hereditarium ex successione crevisses, sed virtutibus tuis debitum a summo imperatore meruisses*). Obviously, this passage is riddled with problematic claims and assumptions. The panegyrist is telling his audience that Constantine was elevated to the imperial rank by the dying Constantius, that his son had had the choice of retaining the title of *augustus* or accepting the title of *caesar* from Galerius, that Constantine’s election as emperor was, while perhaps not legal, certainly just and proper, and finally that Galerius now had no alternative but to elevate Constantine from the position of *caesar* to that

⁸ Whether Clodius Albinus should be labelled a usurper is open to doubt. In 193 he had the same right to rule as Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger. Be that as it may, his subsequent self-promotion from the rank of *caesar* to that of *augustus* (in 195 or 196) was indeed tantamount to usurpation. In 260–274, Britain was part of the breakaway “Gallic Empire” (overseen by the “Gallic emperors” Postumus, Marius, Victorinus, and Tetricus), after which it was ruled by the usurpers Carausius in 286–293 and Allectus in 293–296.

⁹ *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 5, 3 (*cum tibi pater imperium reliquisset, Caesaris tamen appellatione contentus exspectare malueris ut idem te qui illum declararet Augustum*). This is a strange way of putting it—from the context Galerius is clearly meant here, yet it was Maximian who proclaimed Constantius emperor.

of *augustus* “on his own merits”. Most questionable of all here is the assumption that the succession itself establishes the legality of imperial power (*hereditarium imperium ex successione*). This may have held true in another century, but not in a tetrarchic system.

The author of a panegyric composed in 310 gets even more carried away when making similar points. As early as the military campaign against the Picts, he has Constantius answer the question of whom he would choose as his successor (the emperor explicitly named his son Constantine).¹⁰ Then, the composer expressly says that the dying emperor appointed Constantine as his successor (again, as if conferring imperial rank were within his competence even in a tetrarchic system); but above all, he tells us that Constantine was the candidate of choice among the entire army (*universus exercitus*). Indeed, the soldiers are said to have robed Constantine in purple even as he was mourning the death of his father—after all, as the panegyrist adds, “it was not fitting to weep too long over an emperor who had been deified”. To make the farce complete, Constantine, we are told, tried to escape the ecstatic soldiers on horseback (*diceris etiam, imperator invicte, ardorem illum te deposcentis exercitus fugere conatus equum calcaribus incitasse*).¹¹

Here we must pause for a moment to consider whether Constantine really could have resisted the imperial rank once it had been offered to him. What the panegyrist is describing to us is *recusatio imperii* or *refutatio imperii*, as witnessed in the election of certain emperors in the third century. The sources repeatedly describe how, when a new emperor was being chosen, the nominee would show reluctance to accept the imperial rank and would have to be persuaded. Or was this—at least in some cases—a story made up later on? When the emperor Jovian died unexpectedly in 364, he had no heir or designated successor, so a new emperor had to be elected. The heads of the imperial army and civil service who were present at the time gathered to discuss who might be the next emperor. Although several names were discussed, they all finally agreed unanimously on Valentinian, the commander of one of the palace units (*tribunus scholae secundae scutariorum*). Once summoned, he showed up, delivered a speech to the assembled troops, and was

¹⁰ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 7, 3 (*rogatus cui imperium decerneret [...] manifeste enim sententia patris electus es, imperator*).

¹¹ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 8, 2–4.

elevated to emperor. Our principal sources for this event—Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus—agree that Valentinianus accepted the appointment quite acquiescently.¹² Case closed? Well, five years after the event, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus—an eminent senator and writer, and a member of one of the foremost Roman families—delivered a panegyric on Valentinian I that gives a completely different account of that moment. He would have us know that Valentinian required persuasion to overcome his protracted show of reluctance and accept the emperorship. “The commonwealth”, said Symmachus, “takes a special delight in men reluctant to assume supreme power” (*nam res publica vehementius delectatur invitis*). In the end, everything turned out well, with Valentinian conquering his modesty (*verecundia*) and showing his devotion to the empire (*devotio*) by yielding to what was being urged of him. “Sometimes”, Symmachus surmised, “the intransigence of soldiers comes in useful” (*prodest nonnumquam militaris improbitas*).¹³

The election of Theodosius I in 379 was similar. After the death of the Eastern emperor Valens in 378, his nephew Gratian, who was emperor in the West, decided to choose a co-ruler for the East and alighted upon the general Theodosius. Here, once again, we have the sources’ initial dry account, followed years later by an elaborate panegyric. It probably comes as no surprise that none of the standard historical sources gives the slightest indication of any reluctance on Theodosius’ part. For the most part, they briefly mention that Gratian summoned Theodosius from Hispania and made him co-ruler on 17 January 379 in Sirmium, and leave it at that.¹⁴ Then, 10 years after this event, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius gave a panegyric on Theodosius that addresses, among other things, the circumstances of his accession to power. The panegyrist tells us that Theodosius initially refused the offer of the throne, though he would have us know this was not for show and not just so that the candidate would have seemed, eventually, to yield (*oblatus imperium deprecatus es, nec id ad speciem tantumque ut cogi videreris*). Then he lets the land of the Romans itself speak; it begs Theodosius to accept the throne for its salvation, adding that “you are no longer allowed not to want the

¹² Amm. Marc. XXVI, 1–2; Zos. III 36.

¹³ Symmachus, *Laudatio in Valentinianum senioreum Augustum prior* 9–10.

¹⁴ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 34, 2; Zos. IV, 24; *Epitome* 47, 3; *Cons. Const.* s. a. 379; Socr. *HE* V, 2; Soz. *HE* VII 2, 1; Theod. *HE* V, 5–6.

rule bestowed upon you by the emperor, much as you were formerly not allowed to want it" (*imperium, quod ab imperatore defertur, tam tibi nolle iam non licet quam velle non licuit*).¹⁵

Just as it is no coincidence that *recusatio imperii* is mentioned in these panegyrics, it is also no coincidence that the panegyric to Constantine is bent on convincing his audience that Constantine frankly had no wish to assume the throne for himself in 306. Constantine's refusal of power was probably a fabrication on the part of a panegyrist who felt compelled to incorporate the future emperor's supposed modesty into his rhetorical work.¹⁶ The alternative is that it may have been true, but feigned and choreographed; after all, it is not entirely inconceivable that Constantine, like others before and after him, was ostensibly reluctant to accept the emperorship, especially if Constantius had not named him his successor. We will explore this possibility later, but for now we will just note that there were indeed cases where a candidate for the imperial title refused the honour so steadfastly and vehemently that, in the end, it really was not conferred on him.¹⁷ It is now time to examine the accounts of other sources, both Christian and pagan, that were written after the two panegyrics cited above and that have something to say about the events of 25 July 306. First, there is the testimony of Lactantius (written around 315). Lactantius describes how Constantine arrived "astonishingly quickly" in Britain, where his father was on his deathbed. Constantius "commended his son to the soldiers and handed over the reins of power to him",¹⁸ whereupon he expelled his last breath. In the next chapter, Lactantius makes the brief but very significant point that Constantius made his son an *augustus* outright, not just a *caesar*.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* II (12), 11–12.

¹⁶ As far as Szidat (2010, 75–76) is concerned, the concept of *recusatio imperii* is integral to panegyrics; after a while, the legitimate emperor wants to make it clear that his reluctance on the day of his election sets him apart from any usurper (who, on the contrary, is traditionally described as a man hungry for power).

¹⁷ One example was Secundus Salutius, the praetorian prefect of the East, who was nominated as the new emperor after the death of the emperor Julian in 363 (see *PLRE I*, 814–817). Another such case, as we have already seen, was the praetorian prefect Adventus in 217.

¹⁸ *Lact. mort. pers.* 24, 8 (*at ille incredibili celeritate usus pervenit ad patrem iam deficientem, qui ei militibus commendato imperium per manus tradidit*).

¹⁹ He is repeatedly referred to as *augustus*. See *Lact. mort. pers.* 24, 9 (*Constantinus Augustus*); 25, 5 (*Constantinum vero non imperatorem, sicut erat factus, sed Caesarem*).

Eusebius' version—written some 33 years after the event—is similar to what Lactantius has told us. Here, too, Constantine reaches his father just as he is dying, but Constantius still finds the strength to rise, embrace his son, and declare that the only thing that had still saddened him—his son's absence—was now gone. Whereupon Constantius “sent up a prayer of thanksgiving to God” and settled his affairs: he gave instructions to “his sons and daughters” and, “according to the law of nature”, handed over control to his eldest issue, that is, to Constantine. Then he died.²⁰ As we can see, there is little variance between the two versions (according to Eusebius, Constantius commends his son not to the soldiers, but to members of his family). Eusebius takes pains to stress the natural right of Constantius' son to rule (and probably takes the soldiers' consent for granted). As for the “sons and daughters”, this is an allusion to Constantius' offspring from his second marriage, to Theodora, who bore him three daughters and three sons. Although we do not know the year of birth of any of them, they must all have been born after Constantius' marriage to Theodora, which probably took place in 293. This means that none of them could have been more than 13 years old in 306.

The much later work of Paulus Orosius (from around 417) can be included in this group of works because it also seeks to persuade us of the “natural continuity of government”, as though the tetrarchy—of which Constantius was very much a part—did not actually exist: “Augustus Constantius, a most amiable and gentle man, died in Britain, leaving as ruler in Gaul Constantine, his son by the concubine Helena”.²¹ This gives the impression that Constantine simply “took over the helm of government from his father” (*Constantinus [...] gubernacula imperii a Constantio patre suscepit*),²² as though everything were cut and dried.

Other sources take—sometimes very—different views on Constantine's assumption of power. The *Origo* says that Constantius died in York after his victory over the Picts, and Constantine became emperor “with the consent of all the soldiers”, but with the rank of caesar.²³ Aurelius Victor

²⁰ Euseb. *VC* I, 21.

²¹ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 16 (*Constantius vero Augustus summae mansuetudinis et civilitatis in Britannia mortem obiit. Qui Constantinum filium ex concubina Helena creatum imperatorem Galliarum reliquit*).

²² Oros. *Hist.* VII, 26, 1.

²³ *Origo* 2, 4 (*post victoriam autem Pictorum Constantius pater Eboraci mortuus est et Constantinus omnium militum consensu Caesar creatus*).

starts by mentioning that Constantius had wanted to be a ruler since he was a boy. Once he had extricated himself from Galerius' power—having been effectively held hostage in the East—he saved himself by fleeing to Britain, “where, by happenstance, his father lay dying, and after his death Constantine assumed power at the insistence of all present”.²⁴ Eutropius and Jerome simply say that Constantine was “made emperor in Britain” or that he “assumed power”, but they do not disclose how this came about.²⁵ Two writers of ecclesiastical histories, Socrates Scholasticus and Philostorgius, are similarly vague.²⁶ Then there is the testimony of Zosimus, who, as usual, is hostile to Constantine: “It was at this time that the emperor Constantius died. Although he had legitimate sons, the soldiers of the imperial bodyguard recognised none of them as worthy of rule; with their eyes set on Constantine’s sturdy physique and their minds on the prospect of great gifts, they conferred on him the rank of caesar”.²⁷ Zosimus would have us believe that the soldiers of the bodyguard (or, more precisely, the elite troops present in York) were acting of their own accord and that Constantine played no part.

To round off this exploration of the sources, we will look at the brief information left to us by the anonymous author of the *Epitome*. Here, as in many other places, he draws on Aurelius Victor, but in this case embellishes it with a quite remarkable detail. Like Victor, the *Epitome* has Constantius arrive in Britain, “where, by happenstance, his father lay dying, and after his death Constantine assumed power at the insistence of

²⁴ Aur. Vict. 40, 2–4 (*Quod tolerare nequiens Constantinus, cuius iam tum a puero ingens potensque animus ardore imperitandi agitabatur [...] in Britanniam pervenit. [...] Et forte iisdem diebus ibidem Constantium patrem vel parentem vitae ultima urgebant. Quo mortuo cunctis qui aderant, annitentibus imperium capit*). Victor’s English translator (Bird, 1994, 179) chose to delete the words *vel parentem*, as they were probably a later addition by a scribe who had seen the term *parentem* in the *Epitome* (see below). The German edition keeps them (Gross-Albenhausen & Fuhrmann, 1997, 126).

²⁵ Eutr. X, 2, 2 (*verum Constantio mortuo Constantinus ex obscuriore matrimonio eius filius in Britannia creatus est imperator et in locum patris exoptatissimus moderator accessit*); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 306 (*Constantius XVI imperii anno diem obiit in Britannia Eboraci, post quem filius eius Constantinus ex concubina Helena procreatus regnum invadit*).

²⁶ Socr. (*HE* I, 2, 1) keeps it brief, telling us only that, after the death of Constantius, Constantine “succeeded his father as emperor”. Philostorgius (*HE* I, 5) is similarly brusque, noting that Constantius died in Britain, that Constantine had found him alive but sick there, and that when he died he saw to his burial and succeeded him in government.

²⁷ Zos. II, 9.

all present” (this passage is identical to Aurelius Victor’s), “but especially with the consent of Crocus, king of the Alamanni, who, having command of the auxiliaries, belonged to Constantius’ inner circle”.²⁸ This Crocus appears to have been a great help in transferring power to Constantine. Yet it is only the *Epitome* that passes on this detail; Crocus is not known to us from other sources. The sentence’s sheer brevity makes it all the more difficult to translate, but the phrase *auxilii gratia* should probably be taken to mean that Crocus commanded an auxiliary detachment (or detachments) of the Roman army (*auxilium*, plural *auxilia*) composed of Alamanni. Such units really are documented in the late Roman Empire, though in a later period and not in Britain.²⁹ Similarly, the term used to characterise Crocus, *Constantium comitato*, probably signifies that he had long been part of Constantius’ court. But what are we to make of the description of Crocus as a “king” (*rex*)? First of all, the Alamanni, like the Franks, had no central government or single leader at this time.³⁰ At most, Crocus may have been the leader of all or part of an Alamannic tribe that had somehow found itself in Roman service. It was not unusual for a former tribal chieftain or leader of a band of *Germani* to enter into the service of Rome and even make a career of it. For example, we know of Munderic, a Visigothic under-chieftain who was subordinate to the senior Visigothic leader Athanaric in 376, but then (probably between 376 and 382) entered into Roman service and commanded troops in the Roman province of Arabia (in what is now Jordan). Because, in this province in the latter half of Theodosius’ reign, we can see a rare example of officers holding both civil and military authority, Munderic’s full title may well have been not just *dux Arabiae* (or *dux limitis Arabiae*, as Ammianus

²⁸ *Epitome* 41, 2–3 (*ad patrem in Britanniam pervenit; et forte iisdem diebus ibidem Constantium parentem fata ultima perurgebant. Quo mortuo cunctis, qui aderant, annitentibus, sed praecipue Croco, Alamannorum rege, auxilii gratia Constantium comitato imperium capit*).

²⁹ See *Notitia Dignitatum*, *Oriens* 31 and 32: the *cohors nona Alamannorum* was commanded by the *dux Thebaidos*; the *ala prima Alamannorum* and the *cohors quinta pacta Alamannorum* were under the charge of the *dux Phoenices*. Unsurprisingly, the *Notitia* records no Alamannic unit for Britain, since the details provided in this document cover the late fourth century (as far as the Eastern half of the empire is concerned) and the early fifth century (for the Western half of the empire), not to mention the fact that there are numerous gaps in the extant text. See Lee (2007, 76) and Kelly (2004, 40).

³⁰ Drinkwater (2007, especially 117nn) describes how their political institutions evolved.

says), but actually *dux et praeses Arabiae*.³¹ An even better example is Vadomar. Captured by Julian—then still a *caesar*—on the Upper Danube frontier in 361, this Alamannic king went on (between 361 and 365) to become commander of the province of Phoenicia (*dux Phoenices*) in what is now Lebanon. Later still, in 371, he successfully fought the Persians in Armenia.³² Munderic and Vadomar were both very powerful men in Roman service, but their background was by no means unique.

In fact, the most compelling parallel to Crocus' case is related by Ammianus Marcellinus. In 372, the emperor Valentinian I appointed Fraomar as the new king of the Bucinobantes, an Alamannic tribe on the other side of the Rhine, near Mainz. Shortly afterwards, however, "he transferred him to Britain as a tribune and placed him at the head of an Alamannic unit that was distinguished at the time for its size and vigour".³³ The emperor also entrusted military roles to two other Alamannic leaders (*primates*), but Ammianus tells us nothing more about them. When dealing with Germanic leaders or kings who had been captured or defected, it was common practice for the Romans to place them in charge of auxiliary units; more prominent former kings were probably even appointed to higher office within the imperial administration.

The reference to Crocus as *rex* may mean that he was a former king (like Vadomar or Fraomar). Alternatively, the author of the *Epitome* is perhaps not using the term literally, but is simply alluding to the fact that he was the leader of a group of Alamanni. Either way, his band of warriors need not have been that big, perhaps numbering just 500–800 men.³⁴ This is roughly the size of the *auxilia*, the new type of

³¹ Amm. Marc. XXXI, 3, 5; *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. 37.

³² Amm. Marc. XXI, 3–4; XXVI, 8, 2; XXIX, 1, 2. Vadomar, evidently much like Crocus, was king not of all the Alamanni, but only some of them, though the author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (42, 14) describes him as an exceptionally powerful monarch (*potentissimum eorum regem Badomarium*).

³³ Amm. Marc. XXIX, 4, 7. The *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. 6, 17, and 58) does refer to a military unit named *Bucinobantes*, but says it was part of the East's field army. This does not mean, of course, that there was not a similar unit in Britain which, for some reason, the *Notitia* fails to mention.

³⁴ Drinkwater (2009), nevertheless, tends towards the view that Crocus commanded a group of between three and six thousand men. If true, it would be difficult to explain why no other document mentions him, since contingents this large do not usually escape the attention of our sources.

infantry unit established during the tetrarchy. They were first formed by the emperor Maximianus from the Rhenish *Germani*. Constantine subsequently increased their numbers; some scholars believe that he even made them the backbone of his army.³⁵ However, we cannot claim to know exactly what position Crocus held at Constantius' court.³⁶

Ultimately, the number of men Crocus had under him may not have been that significant. It was probably more important to be in the right place at the right time. If Crocus was a loyal collaborator of Constantius and Constantine and there were not many troops of the regular Roman army in York at the time, a few hundred gritty and elite warriors would have been enough—their immediate support may have made all the difference. As a typical Germanic warrior loyal only to his lord and not to the Roman empire *per se* (whose concept of tetrarchy he appears not to have understood at all), Crocus had no qualms about wielding his authority and deploying his men to safeguard Constantine's usurpation (we will come to the problem of the legality of Constantine's elevation to the rank of emperor in a moment).

We do not know how Crocus found himself in Roman territory. He and his men may have been captured by the Romans somewhere on the Upper Rhine, or perhaps he crossed over to the Romans to be recruited as a servant of Rome out of choice. He would have had a good opportunity to do so, for example, in 287–288, when the emperor Maximian delivered a powerful and, it seems, extremely successful blow against the Alamanni and Franks.³⁷ In 289, the author of a panegyric reflects on the feats achieved by Maximian in this campaign: “So many kings, O Emperor, have become your vassals [*clientes*]! Through you and from you and facing you, Gennoboude has recovered his kingdom! For what else did he seek of you by coming to you with all his people but to rule at last with sovereign power, having reconciled with you, Maximian? I have heard that he repeatedly showed you to his people and bade them look long upon you and learn submissiveness, for he himself became

³⁵ Lee, “The Army”, 214.

³⁶ Salway (1993, 233), for example, suggests that he was “in command of a cohort of Alamanni”.

³⁷ Kuhoff, *Diokletian und die Epoche der Tetrarchie*, 77nn; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 142; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 283; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 50–51.

your servant”.³⁸ A little later (probably in 291) another panegyric alludes to the fact that “the Franks, led by their king, came to sue for peace” (*Franco ad petendum pacem cum rege venientes*).³⁹ In all likelihood, this is the same event. While the details are vague, we can assume that Gennoboude was defeated in this campaign and forced to plead for an end to the fighting. The emperor agreed to peace in the land, and—to everyone’s benefit—the king and his fellow Franks became vassals of the Romans. The Alamanni, too, were having to endure Roman military expeditions into their territory at this time. A panegyric written in 297 in honour of Constantius I and his achievements dwells on the fact that “the king of the most savage of tribes was taken captive thanks to the snares he himself had set, and from the Rhine bridge to the Danube crossing at Guntia, Alamannia was torched and razed to the ground”.⁴⁰ It is a shame that the panegyrist, despite proudly declaring that he witnessed these events first-hand, does not tell us the name of the king, who could conceivably have been our Crocus.⁴¹

Interestingly, in his much later history of the Franks, Bishop Gregory of Tours mentions—with reference to Sulpicius Alexander’s lost history—an invasion of Gaul by the Frankish “dukes” Genobaud, Marcomer, and Sunno in 388.⁴² Similarly, Gregory speaks of an Alamannic king named Chrocus, who is said to have ravaged all of Gaul during the reigns of the emperors Valerian and Gallienus (253–260), before eventually falling into captivity at Arles, after which he was tortured and executed.⁴³ Assuming that Gregory is not just recounting a legend—we know he relies, no matter how muddled he gets, on solid sources in the first and second books of his history—then this Chrocus/Crocus could be the grandfather of our own Crocus who commanded the Alamannic troops in Britain,

³⁸ *Pan. Lat.* X (2), 10, 3.

³⁹ *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), 5, 4.

⁴⁰ The bridge in question was evidently the one at Mainz, and Guntia is present-day Günzburg, so we are talking about almost the entire area of the former *Agri Decumates*, which had been lost in the 260s and which Maximian and Diocletian were now trying to reconquer. See Drinkwater (2007, 181).

⁴¹ *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 2, 1 (*captus scilicet rex ferocissimae nationis inter ipsas quas moliebatur insidias et a ponte Rheni usque ad Danubii transitum Guntiensem deusta atque exhausta penitus Alamannia*). See also Drinkwater (2007, 146).

⁴² Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum libri decem* II, 9.

⁴³ Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum libri decem* I, 32 and 34.

and Genobaud/Gennoboude could be a distant descendant of a Frankish chieftain around at the time of the tetrarchy. On the other hand, it may just be that different, unrelated leaders shared a common name; after all, this has not exactly been a rarity throughout history. What we must not do is let our imagination run riot, as Petr Charvát did when, in all seriousness, he claimed that Crocus is none other than Krok, a fabled and legendary duke in Bohemian history!⁴⁴ How could a legend about an Alamannic chieftain from the early fourth century have reached Bohemia in the sixth century (assuming that these Bohemian legends stem from the time the Slavs were settling the Czech Lands)? Even if Crocus had been richly rewarded for his services to Constantine and returned to his homeland,⁴⁵ most likely somewhere in the area of today's south-western Germany, it is not at all clear how the legend about him could have survived the next few centuries and, moreover, spread so far eastwards. There is no rhyme or reason to such speculation.⁴⁶

Let's recap. Constantine is made emperor by the will of his father according to the following sources: two panegyrics, Eusebius, Lactantius, and Orosius. Four other sources—Eutropius, Jerome, Philostorgius, and Socrates Scholasticus—are vague, i.e. they do not make it clear who actually made Constantine emperor. Four sources suggest that a pivotal role was played by either the courtiers (Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome*) or the military, i.e. bodyguards or palace troops (the *Origo* and Zosimus). These last four sources may be actually consistent (or at least not contradictory) with each other. The “palace soldiers” referred to by Zosimus could well be “all the soldiers” mentioned by the *Origo*, and the language used by Aurelius Victor and the author of the *Epitome* might be a heavy

⁴⁴ Charvát, *The Emergence of the Bohemian State*, 13.

⁴⁵ Drinkwater (2009, 194) mentions this possibility, suggesting that “he was probably paid off as soon as possible and sent back”.

⁴⁶ The only argument that anyone could possibly advance here (Charvát himself offers nothing to back up his assertion) is that Crocus was able to take control of some of the Alamanni on his return and then, say, around 310 make a raid into Bohemia, where the legend of this mighty king who had been behind a great Roman emperor's rise to power somehow survived until the sixth century, when it was appropriated by the Slavs, who decided they would ignore entirely his connection with the empire. Rather than floating preposterous ideas, we would be better off keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground. The similarity of the names Krok and Crocus/Chrocus is most likely coincidental (the former may be of Slavic origin; the latter is probably of Germanic origin).

veil obscuring the fact that they mean soldiers. In other words, Constantine could quite possibly have been orchestrating a usurpation with the help of the army. This would hardly have been unusual; usurpers were ten a penny in the empire. If Crocus had command of at least a few hundred troops directly in York, he could have lent persuasive weight to Constantine's decision to seize power by intimidating those courtiers who were hesitant to give their consent.

Any usurper who seizes empire-wide power automatically gains legitimacy (take Septimius Severus, for example). Any usurper who is recognised, even if only temporarily, by an existing legitimate emperor also gains legitimacy for the duration of that recognition (e.g. Clodius Albinus, who was made *caesar* by Septimius Severus). On the other hand, Carausius, who proclaimed himself emperor in Britain in 286, was a true usurper in that he rebelled against the two legitimate emperors of the time, but never achieved recognition. Constantine's fate was in the balance after 25 July 306—would he gain legitimacy, as Clodius Albinus had, or be rebuffed like Carausius?

There is still no consensus on the legality of Constantine's power in 306. Just as a section of Constantius' court may have hesitated to give their blessing to what appeared at first (and second) sight to be usurpation, modern historical scholarship has also wavered and remains divided on how to answer this question. Some modern scholars interpret Constantine's actions as usurpation,⁴⁷ or at least lean in that direction,⁴⁸ while others argue that Constantine's elevation to imperial power by his father—if this actually occurred at all—was legitimate.⁴⁹ Timothy Barnes, as this last group's most prominent spokesman, recalls that something very similar occurred in November 361, when the reigning *augustus* Constantius II, on his deathbed, elevated his relative Julian from the

⁴⁷ Girardet, *Der Kaiser und sein Gott*, 27; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 36; Humphries, "From Usurper to Emperor", 100; Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 62; Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 21; Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 16; Drake, *Constantine, and the Bishops*, 166; Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 47.

⁴⁸ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 112; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 170.

⁴⁹ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 79; Stephenson, *Constantine*, 116–117; Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 165. The legitimacy of this act is defended most robustly by Barnes (2014, 63; and especially 1981, 28: "Constantine could only be called a usurper on the most tendentious of definitions").

rank of *caesar* to that of *augustus*, thereby designating him his successor. Back in 306, however, the situation was very different, though it did have parallels (a dying emperor named Constantius elevating a relative to imperial power). Unlike his grandson Constantius II (who had no fellow *augustus*), Constantius I did not have the exclusive right to appoint his successor in 306, and certainly not directly to the rank of *augustus*. At most, the dying Constantius I could recommend his son to Galerius as the new emperor, and then only with the rank of *caesar*. From a legal perspective, therefore, this was no election; it could have been nothing more than a recommendation. Therein lay the charm of the tetrarchic system: if an *augustus* died unexpectedly, his *caesar* was ready to take his place. In these circumstances, and similarly if the *caesar* died suddenly, it was the imperial college's job to discuss who the next *caesar* would be. When an *augustus* died, however, his *caesar* was automatically elevated, since this was precisely how Diocletian intended that the system he had put in place would work. In 306, then, Severus should have been—and in fact legally became—the new *augustus* of the West.⁵⁰ Although Constantius I was the most senior member of the college, even he had no right to change the system established by Diocletian.

Hence we must consider both possibilities: whether Constantine's father did, or did not, have a say in his elevation. If it was Constantius' wish for his son Constantine to become emperor after his death (his other sons, as we have seen, were still too young), then he was wise not to wait for the imperial college's approval, which is unlikely to have been forthcoming (given what Galerius thought of Constantine); besides, waiting was not an option when he knew he was dying. Let us suppose, then, that he decided to take the risk of having his son elected emperor—or that he at least recommended Constantine's election to his people. The question was whether to make him a junior or senior emperor. Constantius must have known that promoting Constantine straight to the rank of *augustus* would have meant setting him up for a civil war. It was far more sensible to give Constantine the title of *caesar*, seeing as that would soon have to be given to someone anyway now that Severus was due for elevation, and while Galerius might have been offended at being thus

⁵⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 25, 5 (*sed illud excogitavit, ut Severum, qui erat aetate maturior, Augustum nuncuparet, Constantinum vero non imperatorem, sicut erat factus, sed Caesarem cum Maximino appellari iuberet, ut eum de secundo loco reiceret in quartum*).

presented with a *fait accompli*, he would probably have put up little resistance. The trouble is, our sources are not entirely clear about the rank conferred on Constantine on 25 July. The fact that Constantine became a *caesar* on that day is attested, first of all, by the two panegyrics (the one from 307 is particularly explicit about this)⁵¹; the *Origo* and Zosimus are equally clear. Lactantius alone is quite specific that Constantius made his son an *augustus*, not a *caesar*. All other sources are less forthright, but if anything implies that Constantine was made an *augustus*.⁵²

Whether or not Constantius wished his son to become emperor was actually of little consequence, because Constantine was determined to reach for the purple come what may. Having secured the support of the army, and thus of the court, he could later proclaim that he was, in fact, complying with his father's dying wish. The same pretence was then maintained when Constantine ostensibly displayed reluctance to accept the imperial rank (as we saw in the testimony provided by the panegyric from 310). Assuming Constantine was a usurper, we are again faced with the same two possibilities: he made himself either a *caesar* or an *augustus* (and, as we already know, the sources will not tell us one way or the other). All we can say is that, if Constantine made a grab straight for the title of *augustus*, this was a sign that he had no qualms about entering into a civil war.

Even so, both Constantine and Galerius intended to avoid an armed confrontation (although, according to Lactantius, the latter flew into a rage upon hearing of Constantine's elevation). As far as Galerius was concerned, it was irrelevant whether Constantine had been made emperor by his father (as Constantine claimed) or whether this had been Constantine's own initiative; what mattered was the fact that the tetrarchic principle, and thus Galerius' own authority, had been undermined. Indeed, with Constantius dead, Galerius went from being the second most important man in the empire to the first. As mentioned above, Severus should have become the new *augustus* of the West and the

⁵¹ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 8, 2 (*O fortunata et nunc omnibus beatior terris Britannia, quae Constantinum Caesarem prima vidisti!*); cf. *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), 5, 3.

⁵² Eutropius used the title *imperator*, but we cannot know for sure whether he meant the full *augustus* title. Socrates talks about Constantine taking "the place of his father", which might indicate the higher title. Aurelius Victor, the *Epitome*, Eusebius, Philostorgius, Orosius, and Jerome seem to suggest that Constantine took over the reins of government with the title *augustus*.

empire's second man; Maximinus Daia was to be the third in order, and the new, as yet undesignated *caesar* of the West was to assume the fourth place in the tetrarchic hierarchy. Galerius was unwilling to allow this order to be upset. He now had three options: to take up arms against Constantine, to ignore him, or to recognise him as *caesar* of the West. The fact that Constantine's power derived—at least supposedly—from a superior authority made the situation all the more delicate and effectively put paid to military aggression. Besides, there were other uncomfortable circumstances: whether or not Constantius had named his son as his successor, there was no denying the fact that blood kinship still carried weight even in the system of the tetrarchy. Galerius himself had put forward his relative Maximinus Daia for the position of Eastern *caesar* in 305, a nomination that Diocletian had approved.⁵³ Plus, Galerius knew Constantine personally—it is not as if this was some unknown usurper. And were Constantine to remain in Britain, it was not hard to imagine—what with the empire of Carausius and Allectus still fresh in the mind—that any attempt to invade the island would be fraught with difficulty.

The prospect of civil war could be swept to one side by legitimising Constantine's election, but Galerius' last option, to ignore Constantine, would make it front and centre, as he would then have had no choice but to install someone else as Western *caesar* (after consultation within the imperial college), and eventually to place Britain in Severus' control anyway—just as Constantius had once subdued this island and rid the empire of the usurper Allectus. In that case, he would just be delaying the inevitability of civil war. So, back to the idea of legitimising Constantine's position: with a little luck, this could avoid conflict altogether.

Whether Constantine considered himself *caesar* or *augustus* played no part in Galerius' strategising. Despite his personal hostility towards Constantine (if Lactantius is to be believed), Galerius eventually decided that Constantine would be *caesar* of the West. Would Constantine accept his offer? He would, and before 306 was out he was recognised by Galerius as a member of the imperial college with the rank of *caesar*. Galerius thus acted quite wisely in legitimising Constantine's de facto usurpation, but to show who had the upper hand he sent Constantine a purple robe of his own accord (as though Constantine's appointment

⁵³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 18, 13–14.

had been Galerius' idea all along).⁵⁴ However, as a way of venting his spleen over his relationship with the new Western *caesar*, he denied Constantine's father divine honours.⁵⁵

A parallel to Constantine's election more fitting than Julian's promotion to the position of legitimate *augustus* in November 361, as drawn by Timothy Barnes, would be Julian's illegitimate elevation from his legitimate rank of *caesar* to that of *augustus* by the assembled soldiers in Paris in February 360. Although Julian also belonged to the imperial family, he had no right to instigate, encourage or tolerate such an act.

There are two complications that make some modern scholars' vacillate over Constantine's usurpation: first, there is the fact that Constantine was not a usurper in the time-honoured sense (not only did he have the backing of the army when he staked his claim, but he was also—supposedly—handed the purple by a superior authority); secondly, he was the son of a reigning emperor, and an *augustus* at that. These considerations would seem to establish legitimacy, since traditionally imperial power was passed down from father to son (if we turn a blind eye to the reigns of adoptive emperors and, of course, the very principle of the tetrarchy). On the other hand, Diocletian had pointedly stifled the dynastic principle in favour of meritocracy—rule by the fittest. Diocletian himself had been dealt a good hand when it came to selecting the fittest, and he also had what it took to enforce this unusual system of guaranteeing the continuity of imperial power. Consequently, the system Diocletian had introduced could only work as long as he himself held the reins of power. After his abdication, it was only a matter of time before the system collapsed. But that does not mean that anyone had the right to hasten its collapse by prodding holes in it.

⁵⁴ Lact. *mort. pers.* 25, 3 (*ipsi purpuram misit, ut ultro ascivisse illum in societatem videretur*).

⁵⁵ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 166. Stephenson (2010, 116) argues that there had always been an understanding between Constantine and Galerius that, if Constantine's father died, he himself would become *caesar* of the West. The fact that his soldiers were so zealous as to bypass the junior title and directly make him *augustus* was supposedly not Constantine's fault. Constantine at once explained the situation to Galerius, who approved his elevation, though obviously only to the rank of *caesar*, without further ado. Stephenson's explanation removes the initiative from Constantine and attributes it instead to the army; it also ignores Galerius' hostility towards Constantine, as evidenced by Lactantius' testimony; and above all, it flouts the spirit of all the sources that relate Constantine's path to power.

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The Fight for the West

Maximian's son Maxentius lived in a villa not far from Rome. Despite being part of the “extended tetrarchic family” (he was married to Galerius' daughter),¹ Maxentius, like Constantine, was not given the chance to become a member of the imperial college in 305. Zosimus tells us how outraged Maxentius was when he learned of Constantine's act of usurpation in 306. The son of a low-born mother was to be emperor, while he, the issue of an eminent emperor, was meant to content himself by watching on from the sidelines.² Maxentius responded by exploiting the discontent simmering among the people of Rome in the wake of Galerius' decision to abolish their tax immunity. Rome—including a 100-mile radius around the city—had hitherto been exempt from taxation (see Chapter 4); that was about to change. Galerius also planned to abolish the praetorian guard and had already dispatched some of it to the East. The remainder of the guard still in Rome rebelled against the rule of the

¹ *PLRE I*, 571. Galerius' daughter Valeria Maximilla bore Maxentius two sons: Valerius Romulus, who died in 309, and another whose name eludes us, but whom we know was still alive in the run-up to the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge (see below).

² *Zos.* II, 9.

emperor Severus and proclaimed Maxentius their emperor on 28 October 306.³

Just as Constantine had done, Maxentius called on Galerius to recognise him as emperor. We have seen how Galerius legitimised Constantine's usurpation only with the greatest reluctance; now, the tetrarchy had no room for a fifth emperor, not to mention the fact that Galerius cordially detested his son-in-law.⁴ Maxentius initially refrained from styling himself *augustus* or *caesar*, preferring the neutral *princeps* on coins instead. Galerius decided that Severus and Maximinus Daia were to be consuls for 307; Maxentius refused to recognise Severus as consul and appointed Galerius himself in his place. This, as Barnes noted, could only mean one thing: that Maxentius was still holding out hope at the end of 306 that he would be recognised by Galerius.⁵ Perhaps Maxentius imagined that, once recognised, he would rule the West as *augustus*, with Constantine as his *caesar*. Only after his hopes had been dashed did he begin to refer to himself, in early 307, as *augustus*. Following his act of usurpation, he controlled central and southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and Africa; it was not until the beginning of 307 that he added northern Italy subsequent to the fiasco that was Severus' invasion (see below).⁶

By contrast, Constantine, after his usurpation, controlled only Britain, but very soon added Gaul to his territory. With Constantine's father Constantius spending the last years of his reign in Britain, the chieftains of the various Alamannic and Frankish tribes sensed an opportunity to plunder Gaul. The Franks' invasion on the Lower Rhine gave Constantine a welcome excuse to cross to the continent with his field army. "These kings of the Franks", said a Gallic rhetorician, "who have broken the peace in your father's absence, you have not hesitated to punish with the heaviest penalties" (*reges ipsos Franciae, qui per absentiam patris tui*

³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 26, 1–4. Aurelius Victor (40, 5), too, mentions that this usurpation was backed by the people and the praetorians. Other sources speak only of the praetorians (*Origo* 3, 6; Eutr. X, 2).

⁴ Galerius loathing of Maxentius is mentioned by Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 26, 4) and confirmed by the *Epitome* (40, 14).

⁵ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 30.

⁶ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 13. Later, probably in 308, Domitius Alexander took Africa from him (see below).

pacem violaverant, non dubitasti ultimis punire cruciatibus).⁷ Constantine indeed reacted very quickly. Still in 306, perhaps August, he captured and executed the Frankish kings Ascaricus and Merogaisus.⁸ The author of a panegyric described these kings as very savage and unspeakably cruel,⁹ perhaps to justify the fact that Constantine threw them to the beasts during circensian games (probably in Trier, where there was a large amphitheatre).¹⁰ Constantine borrowed this practice from his father, who in 297 also had the captured Franks torn apart by wild beasts, in this case in an amphitheatre in London.¹¹ Similarly, Constantine secured Gaul against the Alamanni, and in 308 waged a campaign against the Bructeri.¹² Believing the captives to be too rebellious and unreliable for inclusion in his army, he had these thrown to the beasts, too. There were said to be so many prisoners that the animals got tired of tearing them to pieces.¹³ He went back to punish the Rhenish Germani again in 310 (see below).¹⁴ Constantine, reckoning that he would not be returning to the Rhine for some time, was intent on securing the peace and stability of Gaul by every conceivable means. This strategy seems to have worked. An unknown orator in Trier, probably in 310, addressed the emperor thus: “So long as your enemies are terrified of you, Constantine, let them hate you as much as they like!”¹⁵

⁷ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 10, 2.

⁸ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 11, 5. Potter (2004, 351) says 307. The name Merogaisus closely resembles the names Laniogaisus (*Amm.* XV, 5, 16; *PLRE I*, 495) and Merobaudes (*PLRE I*, 598–599); these two men were probably also Franks.

⁹ *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 16, 5–6 (*ferocissimis regibus Ascarico et comite suo [...] saevissimi reges*).

¹⁰ *Eutr.* X, 3, 2 (*in Galliis et militum et provincialium ingenti iam favore regnabat caesis Francis atque Alamannis captis eorum regibus, quos etiam bestiis, cum magnificentum spectaculum muneris parasset, obicit*).

¹¹ *Pan. Lat.* VIII (4), 17, 1.

¹² Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 63; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 351; Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 89. Pohlsander (2004, 18) says 307–308.

¹³ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 12, 3.

¹⁴ According to Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 29, 3), they were Franks; this is also the view taken by Odahl (2013, 89) and Potter (2004, 351). Pohlsander (2004, 18) suggests that Constantine directed this campaign against the Franks and Alamanni.

¹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 10, 4 (*te vero, Constantine, quantumlibet oderint hostes, dum perhorrescant*).

So Gaul was his, but what about Hispania? According to Josef Češka, Constantine “had declared war on Maxentius in 309 and taken Hispania from him”.¹⁶ Timothy Barnes, on the other hand, says that there is no reason to believe that Maxentius ever ruled Hispania in the first place.¹⁷ Moreover, as we shall see, the war between Constantine and Maxentius was probably not declared until 311. After all, we already know that when Constantius became *augustus* in 305, he added Hispania to his administration. Thus, after usurping the emperorship in 306, Constantine had only to move quickly in securing Hispania, as it were, by the “right of succession”, which he did sometime at the end of that year, before the same idea occurred to Maxentius (whose father Maximian had ruled Hispania until 305).

From a legal standpoint, at the end of 306 Constantine—by agreement with Galerius—had become the legitimate *caesar*, while Maxentius was still a usurper. Although Maxentius considered himself *augustus*, he did not feel he had troops strong enough in Rome to repel an invasion, not to mention the fact that, like Constantine, he was still essentially a nobody—he could not boast a brilliant career and he was no glorious warrior. He therefore turned to his father, who—despite enjoying a very comfortable retirement in Lucania, southern Italy, since his abdication—was easily persuaded to accept the purple as well.¹⁸ Maximian thus became *augustus* for a second time soon after Maxentius’ usurpation, and that is precisely how he was styled by Lactantius (*bis augustus*).¹⁹ The older man was clearly meant to play second fiddle in this arrangement, but Maxentius knew that Maximian’s experience and especially his fame among the troops could prove a major asset, particularly in the face of an invasion. And that was indeed about to happen on the other side of the empire. Galerius summoned Severus to him from Milan for a conference; Severus then mustered an army in northern Italy and marched on Rome early in 307. He made it as far as Rome but, once there, he found that his soldiers were beginning to desert him, as many of them had served with Maximian and were now reluctant to fight their old commander and his

¹⁶ Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 51.

¹⁷ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 13. Cf. Barnes (1982, 197) and Potter (2004, 370).

¹⁸ Eutr. X, 2.

¹⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 26, 7.

son. Left with a smattering of soldiers, Severus was forced to beat a hasty retreat; he took refuge in Ravenna, where Maximian besieged him and his soldiers surrendered. In the spring of 307, by agreement with Maximian and Maxentius, and having extracted a promise that his life would be spared, Severus abdicated and was taken to Rome as a hostage.

Galerius rejected further entreaties by Maxentius to legitimise his position, continued to regard Severus as the legitimate *augustus* of the West, and planned his own invasion of Italy. However, he had to defeat the Sarmatians on the Danube before he could turn his attention to the rebels. It was probably not until September 307 that he invaded Italy with his army.²⁰ With matters as they stood, Severus was no longer of any use to Maxentius, so he had him summarily slain.²¹ Besides fortifying Rome, Maxentius did one more thing that was intended to help him greatly in the circumstances: he sent his father to Constantine in Gaul to forge an alliance or, failing that, to obtain assurances of neutrality in the coming war. Constantine, like Maxentius, needed legitimacy. We have seen how Galerius officially recognised him in late 306, but only as *caesar* of the West. Now here was Maximian offering him the title of *augustus* and his daughter Fausta—Maxentius' sister—in marriage.²² The temptation was too much for Constantine. This was definitely a win-win situation, though it cost Constantine his legitimacy in the eyes of the Eastern tetrarchs, with Galerius now treating all three self-proclaimed *augusti* of the West as usurpers. In other words, as far as Galerius was concerned, not only was Constantine no *augustus*, but he had also ceased to be a member of the imperial college.²³

Fausta thus married Constantine, probably in September 307 and perhaps in Trier.²⁴ Some scholars have questioned how it is possible that it then took nine years for her to bear Constantine's first child (see the next chapter). Could it be, for example, that she was a very young bride? David Potter actually considered the possibility that she was only eight

²⁰ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 31; cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 69.

²¹ Barnes (2014, 69) gives the date of his death as 15 September 307.

²² Lact. *mort. pers.* 27, 1; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 5.

²³ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 6.

²⁴ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 184.

years old at the time of her marriage.²⁵ However, nothing of the sort is hinted by our main source, the panegyric delivered on the occasion of Constantine's marriage to Fausta. Timothy Barnes appears to be correct in assuming that Fausta was born around 290 (i.e. this would have made her 17 at the time of her wedding).²⁶

While these festivities were taking place in Gaul, a war was being fought in Italy. Galerius' campaign was unfolding in much the same way as Severus' had done: Rome closed its gates on him, and Galerius, who had never been to the city before, was taken aback by the sheer massiveness of the Aurelian Walls. Large though Galerius' army was, it was not enough to blockade and cut off the city. So he resorted to diplomacy: encamping with his army at Interamna (about 100 km north of Rome), he sent his officer (and later emperor) Licinius and the later praetorian prefect Probus to Maxentius in Rome, where they were to promise Maxentius whatever he wanted in exchange for his formal submission to Galerius.²⁷ Maxentius refused. In the meantime, Galerius discovered that he, too, was losing the support of many of his soldiers. He quickly retreated and allowed his men to ravage the country as they travelled through Italy, thus shoring up the loyalty of at least part of his army. But the fact of the matter was that he had to leave empty-handed. Maxentius, by contrast, had grasped firmer control of his territories, yet he was still considered a usurper.

There was also the problem of his father, who had been used to ruling and decided that he had had enough of what was essentially deference to his own son. In planning his coup, however, Maximian misjudged the loyalty of the soldiers stationed around Rome. That, as it turned out, lay

²⁵ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 116. Potter's argument is that, if she was eight years old, this would explain why she did not bear Constantine a child for so long. Harries (2012, 259) also believes that she was still a child in 307. However, the hypothesis of 299 as her year of birth year is weak, as it rests only on information that she was born in Rome and that her father happened to be in the city in 299, which in itself does not mean much (see Barnes, 1982, 34). Potter had previously (2004, 347) also considered 289 and 294.

²⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 56; see also Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 305. See Chapter 5.

²⁷ *Origo* 3, 7. Aurelius Victor (40, 8) claims that Galerius, ahead of his campaign, appointed his officer Licinius as emperor and left him in Illyricum or Thrace; this is contradicted both by the testimony of the *Origo* and by the fact that Licinius was made emperor only as a result of the Conference of Carnuntum (see below), held the following year. Probus appears to have been Licinius' praetorian prefect, probably in 310–314, see *PLRE I*, 740 (cf. Barnes, 1982, 127).

more with Maxentius. When Maximian called a military assembly in April 308 and attempted to depose Maxentius publicly, the soldiers sided with Maxentius. Maximian, forced to flee Rome, took refuge with Constantine in Gaul. This tipped the balance of power again. Maxentius may have gained absolute independence, but he had made an enemy of Constantine. In other respects, too, he remained completely isolated. Worse, he now had a usurper of his own in Africa: his *vicarius Africae*, Lucius Domitius Alexander, had deprived him of these important provinces by staging a rebellion, probably in 308–309. Domitius even took control of Sardinia and cut off Rome’s grain supply.²⁸ Barnes points out that Domitius is attested to have been in his position in Africa from 303, which means that he must have been appointed by Maximian and so probably took his side in his conflict with Maxentius.²⁹ Interestingly, Domitius seems to have sought an alliance with Constantine, as one of his inscriptions (*ILS* 8936) mentions Constantine directly, but this proposition is likely to have fallen on deaf ears. In the East, Galerius saw that the brief and fragile alliance between Maxentius and Constantine had ended and decided to intervene in Western affairs by engaging in negotiations.

On 11 November 308, Galerius called a meeting in Carnuntum that is said to have attended by all the living *augusti*, i.e. not just Galerius and Maximian, but also Diocletian, who emerged one last time from his retirement palace in Split to lend his authority to Galerius’ efforts to reorder imperial affairs. Our knowledge of this imperial council’s agenda is scant. According to the *Epitome*, Maximian and Galerius tried to persuade Diocletian to reassume power (*dum ab Herculio atque Galerio ad recipiendum imperium rogaretur*).³⁰ This passage is probably meant to imply that only Diocletian would return to the imperial college, while Maximian, though still considering himself *augustus*, was to relinquish his imperial claim at the Conference of Carnuntum. The *Epitome* thus perhaps sums up the whole proceedings of the council in a nutshell.

Indeed, it is very difficult to picture how the tetrarchy would have worked if Maximian had remained Western *augustus* and Diocletian

²⁸ The usurpation and its suppression are difficult to date. Barnes (1982, 14–15) pinpointed the years I have mentioned here, but *PLRE I* (43) prefers the range 308–310. Lenski (2016, 249) also forwards the usurpation to 310; Pohlsander (2004, 17) places it as late as 311.

²⁹ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 37.

³⁰ *Epitome* 39, 6.

had become Eastern *augustus* again. As there was no room for a third *augustus* in the tetrarchy, Galerius would have had to be demoted back to *caesar*, which was unthinkable in the circumstances. And if Maximinus were also to remain *caesar*, then of course there is the problem of what to do with Constantine. Launching a military strike against him was out of the question. He could be ignored politically and personally, but that would have made no difference to the fact that Britain, Gaul, and Hispania were firmly in Constantine's grip at the time the Conference of Carnuntum was held. A further alternative, that Maximinus or even Galerius would give up imperial power altogether, was also inconceivable. In this regard, there was a risk that Maximinus, who had not been invited to the council, might not only raise objections, but also accept the title of *augustus* from the soldiers (in fact, this is what actually happened in 310). Galerius, who called the conference, did not tender his resignation here and had evidently not entertained such a possibility.

The idea that only Diocletian would return to the imperial college looks rather more pragmatic. In that case, there would be only one sensible way to re-arrange the tetrarchy: Diocletian and Galerius would be *augusti*, while Maximinus and Constantine would remain *caesares*. This would mean that Maximian would have had to relinquish his rule, and that is indeed what happened at the Conference of Carnuntum.

Apart from the *Epitome*, which, strictly speaking, does not actually mention any meeting, only Lactantius and Zosimus offer us an insight into this conference. The latter clouds the event somewhat, saying only that Maximian visited Diocletian “who was then living in the Gallic city of Carnutum” and tried, in vain, to persuade him to return to politics.³¹ Lactantius, on the other hand, describes how Maximian paid a visit to Galerius, probably at Carnuntum. Here, the old emperor—much to his surprise—also found Diocletian, whose presence was intended to lend a certain gravitas to the act which Galerius was about to perform: the elevation of Licinius to the imperial rank. The initiative here clearly lies with Galerius, not Maximian.³² According to Lactantius, the real reason for Maximian's journey was to oust Galerius and take over his empire (the question, of course, is how Lactantius could have known this). Of the other sources, only Eutropius speaks of Maximian unsuccessfully urging

³¹ Zos. II, 10, 4–5.

³² Lact. *mort. pers.* 29, 1–2.

Diocletian to grasp the reins of government again, but this was supposedly after Maxentius' usurpation, i.e. probably in 306, and not in person but by letter(!).³³ Eutropius and all the remaining sources concur that it was Galerius who elevated Licinius to *augustus*; however, Carnuntum is mentioned only by some sources, and none of them places Maximian in the same room as Diocletian. Only Aurelius Victor notes that Galerius took this step after consulting Diocletian (*ascito in consilium Iovio*).³⁴

Regardless of whether Galerius, Maximian, or both attempted to coax Diocletian back to politics at the Conference of Carnuntum, their efforts came to naught. Not only did the senior *augustus* firmly refuse the offer, but he also pressed Maximian to relinquish his imperial power for a second time. Maximian, as always, obeyed Diocletian. The *Epitome* has preserved for us Diocletian's justification for his refusal, which might give the impression that the old emperor had been overtaken by senility: "Would that you could see in Salona the vegetables we have planted with our own hands! Surely then you would not consider imperial rule anything worth striving for!"³⁵ But Diocletian was not senile. Had he not been in robust command of his mental faculties, no one would have invited him to any consultation; had he not been in good physical shape, he would not have made this arduous journey (it was a trek of 640 km from Salona to Carnuntum), and the consultation would simply have been held at his palace instead. The old emperor thus probably quipped about his green fingers as a way of lightening his refusal to be drawn back into politics in any capacity whatsoever.³⁶

³³ Eutr. X, 2.

³⁴ Eutr. X, 4, 1–2 (*a Galerio Licinius imperator est factus*); Aur. Vict. 40, 8; Origo 3, 8 (*tunc Galerius in Illyrico Licinium Caesarem fecit*); Hieron. Chron. s. a. 308 (*Licinius a Galerio Carnunti imperator factus*); Cons. Const. s. a. 308 (*his consulibus, quod est Maxentio et Romulo, levatus Licinius Carnunto III id. Nov.*).

³⁵ *Epitome* 39, 6 (*Qui dum ab Herculio atque Galerio ad recipiendum imperium rogaretur, tamquam pestem aliquam detestans in hunc modum respondit: "Utinam Salonae possetis visere olera nostris manibus instituta, profecto numquam istud temptandum iudicaretis."*). Most modern writers translate *olera* as "cabbages", Potter (2013, 120) and Southern (2004, 171) among them, but if the emperor was being that specific he would have said "*brassica*". Lenski (2007, 65) alone translates *olera* as "vegetables".

³⁶ This is one of the most interesting moments in the whole history of the tetrarchy and gives pause for thought. Pottering about in a field or garden of one's own volition is highly beneficial to physical health, immunity, and mental well-being. This comment by Diocletian perhaps speaks volumes about the character of the old emperor more than

This whittled down the council's agenda to the question of who to choose as the new *augustus* for the West. Of course, no one thought to elevate Constantine. Somewhat surprisingly, Maximinus was also overlooked, despite already serving as *caesar* for three years (Severus had been promoted to *augustus* after just a year). Another person present at the council was Galerius' officer Licinius, who had taken part in Galerius' unsuccessful Rome campaign the year before. According to Eutropius, he had also served Galerius in the campaign against Narseh; they were old and intimate friends.³⁷ Seeing as the council was convened by Galerius, and he seems to have had a decisive say there, it was Licinius who became the new *augustus* of the West. Galerius may have brought Licinius with him to the conference in case Diocletian could not be persuaded to return to rule and take over the West. We will never know. Likewise, it remains shrouded in mystery why he chose not to make Licinius the Eastern *caesar* and elevate Maximinus to Western *augustus* instead.

Valerius Licinianus Licinius was born, some sources tell us, in Dacia.³⁸ The *Epitome* says that he was about 60 years old at the time of his death, which means that he was born in about 265, i.e. before Aurelian evacuated the old Roman Dacia (probably in 271).³⁹ Were it not for the *Origo*, armed with this knowledge we might think that he was indeed born in old Roman Dacia. However, the *Origo* clarifies that it was "New Dacia" (*Nova Dacia*), a new province created by Aurelian south of the Lower Danube.⁴⁰ The *Epitome* adds that Licinius was born into and raised by a peasant family (*ab eo genere ortus altusque erat*), and that he was a good soldier and resolute commander. Licinius is the last emperor who can still be called a tetrarch; all subsequent emperors would belong to one of the dynasties that went on to dominate most of the fourth century. He is also the last of "Galerius' emperors" (having been preceded in this sense by Severus and Maximinus Daia), i.e. someone raised to imperial rank at the recommendation or wish of Galerius (if we are to believe Lactantius;

all his previous acts put together, and anyone who likes this kind of work and has no political ambitions would identify with it.

³⁷ Eutr. X, 4, 1. Zosimus (II, 11) and Aurelius Victor (40, 8) agree.

³⁸ Eutr. X, 4, 1; Socr. *HE* I, 2.

³⁹ *Epitome* 41, 8.

⁴⁰ *Origo* 5, 13. See Chapter 3 for a discussion on Roman troops' withdrawal from Dacia and the creation of a new province (subsequently two provinces) south of the Danube.

see Chapter 5). It is worth reminding ourselves that Galerius himself—nicknamed Armentarius (“the Herdsman”)—was from old Roman Dacia, whence his mother, fleeing the Carpi, crossed the Danube to “New Dacia” when Galerius must have been just a few years old. Maximinus Daia, as the son of Galerius’ sister, shared Galerius’ origin and fate (and original name of Maximinus); and now here was Licinius, also hailing from “New Dacia”, and also of peasant stock, becoming emperor. All of them, then, are friends of Galerius from this province and were born peasants.⁴¹

The council was thus concluded: Galerius elevated Licinius to the new *augustus* of the West, Constantine was made Western *caesar*, and Maximinus remained Eastern *caesar*. Maxentius and Domitius Alexander, of course, continued to be treated as usurpers. Hence the balance of the tetrarchy had been preserved, at least as far as the number of *augusti* and *caesares* was concerned, but not necessarily in how the members of the imperial college understood each other. Constantine had gained legitimacy from the East for a second time. Licinius’ task was to remove Maxentius, for which he required Constantine’s alliance or at least tacit approval, but there had been a significant shift since 306. Although Constantine was now theoretically subordinate to Licinius, he effectively snubbed him and continued to style himself *augustus* in his part of the empire in the West, as if the Conference of Carnuntum and its results did not concern him in the slightest. Both Maximinus and Constantine may have felt insulted that Licinius, the new boy, had leapfrogged them. To make it up to them, Galerius declared them *fili augustorum* (sons of the *augusti*) in early 309, a vague title that neither of them cared for and that would not mollify Maximinus for long.⁴²

An inscription preserved in the *mithraeum* at Carnuntum reveals the efforts that were made to unite all those present: “This shrine was repaired by the *Jovii* and *Herculii*, the most pious *augusti* and *caesares*, for the sun god, the invincible Mithras and protector of their empire”.⁴³ We already know that each legitimate tetrarch ruling in the West was *Herculius* and every legitimate tetrarch in the East was *Jovius*. Thus, the reference is

⁴¹ Though there are doubts about Severus; see Chapter 5.

⁴² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 6.

⁴³ *ILS* 659 (*deo Soli invicto Mithrae, fautori imperii sui, Iovii et Herculi religiosissimi Augusti et Caesares sacrarium restituerunt*).

to Diocletian (*Jovius Augustus*) and Maximian (*Herculius Augustus*) as retired *augusti*, Galerius (*Jovius Augustus*) and Licinius (*Jovius Augustus*) as reigning *augusti*, and the absent *caesares* Maximinus Daia (*Jovius Caesar*) and Constantine (*Herculius Caesar*).

Diocletian went back to his palace at Salona after the council and, by all accounts, never left it again. Licinius remained in Pannonia, where he had been instructed by Galerius to prepare for the Italian campaign. Galerius returned to Serdica⁴⁴; Maximian, now again *senior augustus*, i.e. a retiree and private individual, went to Constantine in Gaul—the only court that was willing to receive him. Licinius was surely intent on proving that Galerius had been right to place his trust in him. However, his first attempt to conquer Italy, in 309, seems to have failed. We have reason to believe that he only gained Istria, and even then perhaps only temporarily.⁴⁵ In the meantime, still in 309, Maxentius sent his praetorian prefect Volusianus with an army to fight Domitius Alexander, who was easily defeated, and thus reattached Africa to his part of the empire. On 27 June 310, Licinius announced to the world that he had vanquished the Sarmatians on the border region of the provinces of *Noricum ripense* and *Raetia*.⁴⁶ This places him practically on the Italian frontier in that year. However, rather than rush into war with Maxentius, he appears to have moved around the Balkans over the next two years. This may have been because Galerius was ill, making it impossible for the Eastern *augustus* to wage war on the Danube in person; now that his duties had fallen to Licinius, the invasion of Italy would have to wait.⁴⁷

Above, we have charted Constantine's wars against the Rhenish Germani in 306–313. In 310, on one of those campaigns, Constantine faced the most serious political crisis of his career to date: a revolt headed by Maximian, his father-in-law, who had been forced to abdicate the purple for a second time in 308. As mentioned, the former Western *augustus* had taken refuge at Constantine's court, where he

⁴⁴ This is according to the *Origo* (3, 8), as followed by Barnes (1982, 64). Leadbetter (2009, 242) is convinced that Galerius headed from Carnuntum to Thessalonica, where he spent the rest of his life (he bases his argument on the fact that the mint was relocated from Serdica to Thessalonica at this time).

⁴⁵ Barnes, *Constantine*, 71; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 33.

⁴⁶ ILS 664; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 81.

⁴⁷ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 219; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 33.

probably served as an adviser. However, rather than accompany his son-in-law on the campaign against the Germani, Maximian—along with most of the army—can be found in southern Gaul. The reasons why Constantine took this decision are worthy of brief discussion. Timothy Barnes initially believed that Maximian was there to secure Constantine's dominion against a possible invasion by Maxentius; later, changing his mind, he ventured that Maximian was probably in southern Gaul so that he would be able to react quickly in case Licinius attempted to invade Italy.⁴⁸ In fact, he may have been there on both counts, although it is not clear what Constantine could have done to counteract a successful invasion of Italy by Licinius. Lactantius does not cite either of these reasons, merely saying that Maximian had planned his coup in advance and that he had persuaded the trustful Constantine to leave the bulk of his army in southern Gaul on the grounds that a handful of soldiers would be enough to take on the barbarians (*paucis militibus posse barbaros debellari*).⁴⁹ More likely, however, Constantine had simply tasked Maximian with protecting the southern border of his empire, but his absence placed irresistible temptation in Maximian's way. It was probably in July that he took up the purple again; he convinced the soldiers that Constantine had fallen in battle with the Franks, then seized the imperial treasury at Arelate (present-day Arles, France) so that he could lavish the soldiers with gifts.⁵⁰ As soon as this news reached Constantine, he immediately abandoned the campaign and dashed to the south. Maximian, deserted by most of his troops as soon as it became clear that Constantine was not dead, retreated to Marseilles (then Massilia), where he intended to entrench himself. The inhabitants of the city, however, opened the gates to Constantine, enabling him to arrest the rebel without trouble. Maximian appears to have been executed or forced to commit suicide shortly thereafter.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 34; Barnes, *Constantine*, 72.

⁴⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 29, 4–5.

⁵⁰ This is the date calculated by Barnes (1982, 13).

⁵¹ Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 30, 1–5) adds to this the improbable story that Maximian was pardoned, but then hatched a foiled plot to assassinate Constantine, was allowed to choose his method of suicide, and hanged himself. According to Barnes (2014, 74), the nub of the story was Constantine's understandable desire to besmirch Maximian as much as possible. A few years later, Constantine had a change of heart (see below).

Maximian is a truly tragic figure. He proved to be a dutiful collaborator for Diocletian and an excellent commander of the Western army, but without Diocletian he showed himself to be a very poor politician, and his repeated duplicity eventually cost him his life.⁵² Maximian's failed usurpation drove Constantine's attempt to find another source of legitimacy; beginning in 310, Constantine started to leak news of his supposed kinship with the emperor Claudius II (see Appendix A). At the same time (in 310, probably in the spring), Maximian informed Galerius that his soldiers had conferred on him the title of *augustus*, which he intended to retain. Galerius, evidently a sick man by then (see below), had no choice but to recognise both Maximian and Constantine as *augusti*. This can be regarded as the final nail in the tetrarchy's coffin. Ultimately, this episode made Maxentius forget his former power struggle with Maximian. He induced the senate to have his father declared divine (*divus Maximianus pater*) and began to declare himself his avenger. In response, Constantine imposed *damnatio memoriae* on the dead Maximian, though probably not until the end of 311, when he was at war with Maxentius.⁵³

None of this was Galerius' concern any more: the Eastern *augustus* died at the end of April or, more likely, the beginning of May 311 (see below). Lactantius took the trouble to recount the full details of the emperor's protracted illness and subsequent death to his readers. He allegedly had a genital ulcer that gradually increased in size. Since cleaning it out did not help, the disease spread to the whole lower part of the body, with putrefaction, maggots, and a great stench adding to the pus.⁵⁴ Unless our Christian sources (Lactantius, Eusebius, and Orosius)

⁵² Cf. Bird (1993, 153) ("Maximian had always been loyal to Diocletian, but obviously his loyalty stopped there.")

⁵³ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 273–274; Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 69. Maximian was later rehabilitated by Constantine; in about 318 he is commemorated as *divus Maximianus optimus imperator* on Constantine's coins (Constantius I and Claudius II also appear in his "commemorative coinage" of deified emperors). Unlike his father, Maxentius would never be rehabilitated by Constantine—not only would he suffer *damnatio memoriae* after his death, but Constantine would also have it proclaimed that Maxentius was not actually Maximian's son, since his mother Eutropia was said to have admitted that he was the son of a Syrian (*Origo* 12; *Epitome* 40, 13).

⁵⁴ Lact. *mort. pers.* 33. Eusebius (*HE* VIII, 16, 4–5; *VC* I, 57) has left us a slightly shorter but otherwise identical version; the *Origo's* account is briefer still (3, 8: *aperto et putrescenti viscere*). Of the pagan historians, Aurelius Victor (40, 9) hints at the origin of the disease, saying it was the result of a wound that had become infected (*vulnere pestilenti consumptus est*); Zosimus (II, 11) also mentions an "incurable wound". Orosius

are exaggerating—which is quite possible⁵⁵—it was probably Fournier gangrene. These days, it is a rare disease with a fairly good chance of survival (treatable with antibiotics, the removal of dead tissue, and other necessary procedures), but in the fourth century it was all but a death sentence. It is likely, despite the sources' silence on the subject, that Galerius also suffered from diabetes (which usually precedes and accompanies Fournier gangrene).⁵⁶ Galerius battled the disease (which Christian writers naturally took to be divine punishment for his persecution of Christians) for a full year.

On 30 April 311, as he was approaching his end, Galerius issued his famous edict putting an end to the persecution of Christians and guaranteeing freedom of religion to all inhabitants of the empire. The text was preserved both by Lactantius (in the Latin original) and by Eusebius (who translated it into Greek).⁵⁷ Although Lactantius calls it an edict, the document actually refers to itself as a letter (*epistula*). It was reproduced and put on display in all the cities of the East. Galerius had another letter dispatched with it, addressed to magistrates (*iudices*), in which he set out more detailed instructions, presumably on the release of those Christians who had been incarcerated for a long time.⁵⁸

The two extant versions are identical, excepting Lactantius' omission of the initial names of the emperors (including their full titles) on whose

(VII, 28, 12–13) adds two unlikely details: that the putrefaction also affected the chest (*putrefacto introrsum pectore et vitalibus dissolutis*) and that the emperor vomited maggots (*etiam vermes eructaret*).

⁵⁵ Leadbetter (2009, 117 and 224) points out that Lactantius' description bears a striking resemblance to an account of the sickness of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (reigned 175–164 BCE), including excruciating abdominal pain, decomposition of the body, pus, maggots, a stench, and the fact that this Hellenistic ruler's illness prompted him to stop persecuting Jews. See 2 Maccabees 9: 5–28.

⁵⁶ Antonis Kousoulis, Konstantinos Economopoulos, Martin Hatzinger, Ahad Eshraghian, and Sotirios Tsiodras, "The Fatal Disease of Emperor Galerius", *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* 215 (2012), 890–893. For the sake of completeness, we should add that some historians believe it was cancer (Barnes, 2014, 72; Odahl 2013, 96; Pohlsander, 2004, 17); others say it is impossible to determine the nature of the disease (Leadbetter, 2009, 224).

⁵⁷ Lact. *mort. pers.* 34; Euseb. *HE* VIII, 17.

⁵⁸ Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 35, 2) testifies that the emperor's decision resulted in the immediate release of those prisoners who had suffered for their faith. Corcoran (2000, 187) ponders whether this second letter, unknown to us, concerned the restitution of property confiscated from Christians.

behalf Galerius made his decision. In Eusebius' version, they are Galerius, Constantine, and Licinius, which is a bit odd considering there were four legitimate emperors in the empire at the time. Maximinus' name was either not in the letter from the beginning, or someone later deleted it from copies of the letter following Maximinus' *damnatio memoriae* in 313. The latter seems more likely, not least because Lactantius insinuates that Galerius was acting on behalf of all the legitimate emperors, and Eusebius explicitly says that Maximinus also received a copy of the edict.⁵⁹ This means that Lactantius and Eusebius were probably working with an "updated" copy of the letter, from which Lactantius preferred to omit the list of emperors altogether, and Eusebius simply translated what he found in his copy.⁶⁰

The text of this open letter provides an explanation not only for the end of the persecution of Christians, but also for why it happened in the first place. The persecution of Christians is intended to safeguard ancestral religious traditions and thus not to fall out of favour with the gods, thereby protecting the empire and each of its citizens; in this light, if such laudable activity fails, the emperor may express frustration at the results, but not regret that the persecution itself has occurred. Moreover, the emperor expresses his disgust with the Christians, whose folly he does not understand and whose barbarity he condemns, since they "have abandoned the religious customs of the ancients" (*parentum suorum reliquerant sectam*) and need to see sense again; for some reason, however, "they have been seized with a foolish desire not to follow the customs of previous generations" (*quadam ratione tanta eosdem Christianos voluntas invasisset et tanta stultitia occupasset, ut non illa veterum instituta sequerentur, quae forsitan primum parentas eorundem constituerant*). Nevertheless, they may now safely return to their ceremonies, provided, of course, that they do not disturb public order in doing so. In addition, Christians are urged to pray to their god for the well-being of Galerius, that of the state, and their own (*pro salute nostra et rei publicae ac sua*), so that now, as David Potter put it, "they will at least be praying for the right things".⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 36, 3; Euseb. *HE* IX, 1.

⁶⁰ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 22–23.

⁶¹ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 134.

According to Lactantius, Galerius' decision was swayed by his terminal illness. Yet, the emperor could just as easily have been motivated by a desire to end a long-running government policy that was clearly failing, and in doing so relieve his successors of a problem that he was still able to resolve himself. Leadbetter reminds us that Galerius was not the “fanatical pagan” that Barnes would have us see in him.⁶² Persecution had been pursued for a noble cause: to defend spiritual traditions and hence to protect the empire. However, it had failed, so the time had come to end it. For the sake of completeness, it should be added that Galerius' proclamation of religious toleration was intended to have an empire-wide reach, but in practice it only applied to the East, since neither Constantine nor Maxentius ever persecuted Christians in the West.

We do not know the exact date of Galerius' death, but according to Lactantius he died a few days after this act (*post paucos dies*), i.e. evidently in early May.⁶³ Nor do we know where the emperor died, but it was probably on the way from Thessalonica, where Galerius spent his last years, to his hometown of Felix Romuliana, where he had had a palace built and where, by all accounts, he wished to be—and was—buried.⁶⁴ Licinius appears to have accompanied him on his last journey. Indeed, it was to Licinius that Galerius, apparently as a last wish, entrusted the protection of his family: his wife Valeria and his son Candidianus. Then he died.

Maxentius and Maximinus reacted to the news of Galerius' death in different ways, but both of them sought to capitalise on it. Maxentius got the Roman senate to declare Galerius divine; he had become the son of the divine Maximian the previous year, and now he wanted to become the son-in-law of the divine Galerius (he was married to Galerius' daughter Valeria Maximilla). Coins recognising the deification of Galerius were issued by Maxentius, Licinius, and Maximinus, but not by Constantine, which is intriguing. Maximinus, who controlled the diocese of *Oriens* (i.e. Syro-Palestine and Egypt), seized the opportunity to occupy Asia Minor. Licinius had no choice but to meet him on the Bosphorus in the summer of that year and make a non-aggression pact with him. Another thing that Maximinus did after Galerius' death was to declare Galerius' proclamation

⁶² Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 222; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 19.

⁶³ Potter (2004, 356) hesitates between April and May; Barnes (2014, 72) says April.

⁶⁴ Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, 242.

of religious toleration void even in his own territory.⁶⁵ Within six months, he began persecuting Christians again.⁶⁶

Another remarkable consequence of Galerius' death was that his wife Valeria, Diocletian's daughter, whom the dying emperor had left in the guardianship of Licinius, now sought asylum with Maximinus. Lactantius explains this by saying that, having refused a proposal of marriage from Licinius, she now hoped to find peace with Maximinus, who had a wife and two children. Surprisingly, however, Maximinus also proposed to her, and when she refused him as well, he banished her and her mother Prisca to Syria. Lactantius also tells us the reason why they both supposedly wanted her as a wife: they were after the inheritance (or, more precisely, legacy)!⁶⁷ But there may be a more likely explanation: according to Lactantius, Diocletian had houses built for both women in Nicomedia.⁶⁸ It is possible that the two of them decided to travel there immediately after Galerius' burial in Felix Romuliana; after Maximinus' swift occupation of Asia Minor, they thus found themselves involuntarily in his part of the empire and thus in his power in the spring of 311. We are still left to ask, of course, why they did not remain in Felix Romuliana, or why they did not make their way to Salona to see Diocletian (who was certainly still alive at that time); it would have been natural for Valeria to go to her father and Prisca to her husband. Hazarding a guess, perhaps in both cases these were military complexes of buildings and fortresses that were not very suited to their lifestyles. Nicomedia might have seemed a much more pleasant place to live. After Maximinus condemned them to exile, Diocletian, sending missives from his palace, is said to have repeatedly pleaded with Maximinus to allow Valeria to come to him, but to no avail.⁶⁹ Why Maximinus did not permit her to do so, and why he sent the women into exile in the first place, we cannot say, but it may have had something to do with the fact that they would have gone to a part of the empire controlled by Licinius, with whom Maximinus was at enmity; and he may also have still been harbouring resentment against Diocletian for passing him over

⁶⁵ Lact. *mort. pers.* 36, 1–3.

⁶⁶ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 40.

⁶⁷ Lact. *mort. pers.* 39 and especially 50, 5 (*Valeriam quae volenti Licinio in omnia Maximiani bona hereditatis iure succedere, idem Maximino negaverat*).

⁶⁸ Lact. *mort. pers.* 7, 9 (*hic uxori domus, his filiae*).

⁶⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 41.

in favour of Licinius. As for the inheritance, Lactantius does not appear to be referring to property. Rather, the clue is the marriage proposal from both emperors. Fortyrish and demonstrably barren, Valeria was not going to provide a son and heir, but she could lend greater prestige and provide primacy within the imperial college. After all, she was still the daughter of the tetrarchy's founder, and one of the imperial provinces was named after her. As Maximinus already held primacy within the imperial college (and also had a son), it seems more likely that any marriage proposal would have come from Licinius, whose only source of legitimacy—Galerius—was now dead. This idea has greater traction when we consider that the rejected Licinius later married Constantine's sister Constantia.

Once Licinius had struck a deal with Maximinus in the East, he was finally ready to take on Maxentius. As was Constantine. Although hostilities between Constantine and Maxentius do not begin until the spring of 312, in all likelihood war was declared earlier, in 311. Maxentius, politically isolated in Italy and facing military threats from both Western *augusti*, now formed an alliance with Maximinus, while Constantine offered Licinius his sister Constantia in marriage in exchange for siding with him against Maxentius, evidently in late 311 or early 312.⁷⁰ We are left to speculate what exact arrangement was reached between Licinius and Constantine. Potter says that the terms of the agreement probably involved some form of tactical manoeuvre on Licinius' part that would distract Maxentius in order to keep part of his army tied up in north-eastern Italy, rendering it unable to respond to Constantine's invasion of Italy from the north-west.⁷¹ Pohlsander simply concludes that the pact gave free rein both to Constantine in his fight against Maxentius in Italy and to Licinius in his scheme against Maximinus in the East.⁷² Barnes takes a completely opposite view, suggesting that Constantine invaded Italy in the spring of 312 in order to forestall Licinius, who was finally ready—three years after the Conference of Carnuntum—to carry out the

⁷⁰ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 20; Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 135.

⁷¹ Specifically, Potter (2013, 135) notes that “The terms, insofar as they can be reconstructed from later events, appear to have involved some sort of military demonstration by Licinius that would tie down some of Maxentius' forces in north-eastern Italy, followed by a pledge of support by Constantine for what would be Licinius' subsequent war against Maximinus”.

⁷² Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 25.

task delegated to him by Galerius.⁷³ But if Constantine's plan had been to outwit Licinius, what sense was there in the betrothal of Constantia, who did actually marry Licinius the following year? It seems more likely that the two Western *augusti* had reached an understanding (probably in late 311) on their future spheres of influence: Constantine wanted to be lord of the West; Licinius was set on dominating the East.

Before progressing to a description of Constantine's Italian campaign, we need to dwell a little on his religious preferences at this time and on his father's probable view of religious matters. Although we know nothing about this side of Constantius, it is extremely unlikely that this tetrarch, whom Diocletian and Maximian had enlisted to co-rule, was a Christian. As Western *caesar*, however, Constantius was very reticent about proceeding with the orders to persecute Christians in 303–305. Certainly, he demolished Christian churches, but, to our best knowledge, he did not have anyone executed for their faith. Thomas Elliott inferred from this that Constantius was a closet Christian who, unable to stand up to Diocletian publicly by opposing his wishes and anti-Christian edicts in 303, chose to tear down a few Christian churches in order to discharge his duty while not burdening his conscience with the murders of his fellow Christians.⁷⁴ A more natural explanation is that Constantius, seeing no reason to actively persecute Christians, put a stop to persecution in his territories altogether following his elevation to *augustus* in 305. Lactantius himself, in another of his works, writes quite clearly that Constantine was the first Christian emperor, and even tells us that he converted to Christianity only after he had “rejected error”; it is thus an admission that Constantine was a pagan—just as his father had been—before his conversion.⁷⁵

Another question is the time of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. The accounts of some contemporary sources are extreme: Zosimus says that Constantine became a Christian only after the death of his eldest son Crispus (i.e. not until 326) because he was filled with remorse; Julian,

⁷³ Specifically, Barnes (2014, 81) observes that “Constantine invaded Italy in the spring of 312 to forestall Licinius, who was now [...] finally ready to take possession of the territories over which he had been appointed to rule at the Conference of Carnuntum in November 308”.

⁷⁴ Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, 21–22.

⁷⁵ Lact. *div. inst.* I, 1 (*Constantine, imperator maxime, qui primus Romanorum principum, repudiatis erroribus, maiestatem Dei singularis ac veri et cognovisti et honorasti*).

in his *Caesares*, also suggests this. These pagan rumours were so rife that, even as late as the mid-fifth century, Sozomen felt the need to refute them.⁷⁶ When Constantine became emperor in 306, he declared that there would be religious toleration in the territories he ruled. This could be interpreted as a continuation of his father's religious policy. Constantine's Italian campaign, on the other hand, undoubtedly marked a turning point in his religious development, and most scholars date Constantine's conversion to 312, with some even pinpointing a particular moment in that year: Charles Odahl believes that Constantine, during his Italian campaign in 312, converted at the moment when he supposedly had his "Christian vision" (as discussed in more detail in Appendix D).⁷⁷ Potter disagrees, arguing that Constantine's conversion took place over a fairly long period of time and was not the result of any single experience or sudden revelation. According to Potter, at the time of Constantine's Italian campaign, there was a transitional period in which the sun god *Sol* (this deity is discussed below) and the Christian God somehow coexisted in his mind.⁷⁸ In Barnes' opinion, in 310 Constantine had a pagan vision figuring Apollo, which he later—in 311 or 312—began to interpret as meaning that his heavenly protector was not Apollo, but Jesus (on this issue, see also Appendix D).⁷⁹ Drake believes that a fundamental change did occur in 312, but it was not so much a matter of Constantine's personal beliefs (which had been evolving over a longer period of time) as his decision to change state policy in order to resolve problems such as the perceived need for political and religious unity in the empire. In other words, in 312 Constantine was looking for an appropriate religious policy rather than a god.⁸⁰ These considerations can be rounded off with

⁷⁶ Zos. II, 29; Julian. *Caes.* 336; Soz. *HE* I, 5. For more Crispus' fate, see Chapter 10.

⁷⁷ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 106. Pohlsander (2004, 26) also dates Constantine's conversion to 312 but, unlike Odahl, he views it as a decision rather than a spiritual experience; in contrast to Odahl, he also places a stress on the gradual process of Constantine's conversion (Pohlsander, 2004, 42).

⁷⁸ Potter (2013, 158–159) ("In 312, Constantine's god was both the Sun and the Christian God. [...] For Constantine, conversion was not the result of a sudden momentous revelation, but a journey over time and in his own mind.")

⁷⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 80.

⁸⁰ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 191. Elsewhere, Drake (2007, 127) is even more explicit, suggesting that polytheism was an organisational nightmare for Constantine, since no one knew which god to pray to, or whether a given god was the right one for the

the plausible claim that, in 306–312, Constantine was most likely a “tolerant pagan with monotheistic tendencies”⁸¹ or, as Noel Lenski elegantly puts it, while still a pagan, he was also a “friend of Christians”.⁸²

CONSTANTINE’S INVASION OF ITALY

Although our sources disagree on who declared war on whom, this is of little matter because the real aggressor was Constantine. Nevertheless, Zosimus writes that Maxentius also sought pretexts for war with Constantine and is even said to have concocted a plan: he first intended to march through Raetia, and evidently wanted to do to Licinius what he had done to Severus and Galerius before—lure the army away from him; only after he had secured the Eastern side in this way would he march his army into Gaul.⁸³ Maxentius was certainly under no illusion about the danger posed by Licinius, who had controlled the whole of the Balkans since the death of Galerius and, most importantly, had been appointed emperor for the very purpose of ousting Maxentius.

Maxentius commanded a large army that had defeated Severus and then Galerius, quelled an attempted usurpation by his father, and stamped out the usurpation by Domitius Alexander in Africa. Constantine had cause for concern. But there were also several factors that worked to his advantage. To counter the imminent threat from Licinius, Maxentius had to leave some—and perhaps (as Barnes concludes) even the main part—of his army in north-eastern Italy, probably at Aquileia.⁸⁴ However, the invasion of Italy, when it came, was launched from precisely the opposite

job (not to mention the risk that other gods might be offended by a preference for a particular god).

⁸¹ Lee, “Traditional Religions”, 169.

⁸² Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 68.

⁸³ Zos. II, 14. Lactantius (*mort. pers.* 43, 4) specifies that the war was declared by Maxentius (*bellum Constantino indixerat*). Eutropius (X, 4, 3) attributes the start of the war to Constantine (*Constantinus [...] bellum adversum Maxentium civile commovit*) and places it in the fifth year of Constantine’s reign (i.e. before 27 July 311).

⁸⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 81. Potter (2013, 138) concludes that Maxentius’ forces were concentrated around Aquileia and Milan.

direction in the spring or summer of 312.⁸⁵ The ability to strike quickly and unexpectedly at an opponent is one of the skills of good military leaders, and Constantine was an excellent commander. His army, disciplined and loyal to its leader (as the crisis of 310 demonstrated), had honed its skills fighting the savage Germani and the equally fierce Picts. The size of this invading army, as well as the total number of troops Constantine had at his disposal in his territories, is addressed in Appendix C. At this point, it is enough to note that, although Constantine must have had to leave a considerable force in Britain and Gaul, he could still afford to allocate 35–40,000 troops to the Italian campaign.⁸⁶ This is the figure that emerges from an analysis of our sources (see Appendix C), and it makes for an army that can be moved quickly and kept supplied on the go. In contrast, Maxentius may have had approximately 100,000 soldiers at his disposal. However, we do not know where and how they were deployed.

Constantine's army descended from Gaul into Italy via Mont Cenis, an Alpine pass.⁸⁷ Constantine intended to keep his army moving no matter what, relying on speed and the element of surprise. He must have approached the campaign against Maxentius not only as a military leader but also as a politician, and he clearly placed a lot of value in a soft-touch plan, for when the first city in Italy, Segusio (present-day Susa, in the Piedmont region), refused to open its gates to him, Constantine attacked and took it quickly, but did not sack it. He then continued his rapid march eastwards and defeated the garrison at Augusta Taurinorum (present-day Turin) in the Battle of Turin. This seems to have been a defining moment in the campaign, because from that point on many cities in northern Italy, including Milan, simply opened their gates to him. By now, one of Maxentius' armies was on the move, marching westwards from Aquileia to confront Constantine. After spending several days in Milan,

⁸⁵ Pohlsander (2004, 20) places the start of Constantine's invasion in the summer of 312; Barnes (2014, 81) and Odahl (2013, 101) make an argument for spring. Potter (2004, 357) concedes that we do not know when the invasion was launched.

⁸⁶ I agree with this estimate by Timothy Barnes (2014, 81). Elliott (1996, 58) and Pohlsander (2004, 20) estimate the number of Constantine's soldiers at 40,000. Few others have risen to the challenge of estimating the sizes of the armies: Odahl (2013, 100) puts Maxentius' army at 100,000 men and calculates that Constantine marched no more than 25–40,000 men into Italy.

⁸⁷ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 357.

Constantine continued east. At Brixia (present-day Brescia), he defeated Maxentius' cavalry and besieged Verona. However, this city's commander, Maxentius' praetorian prefect Ruricius Pompeianus, escaped the siege and took command of Maxentius' main forces. A great and bloody battle was fought at Verona, in which Ruricius Pompeianus fell. Verona capitulated, Aquileia and the other cities of northern Italy switched to Constantine's side, and the first leg of the campaign was thus at an end.

Scholars sometimes suggest that all the hard fighting had been done in northern Italy, and that the famous Battle of the Mulvian Bridge was just the *coup de grace*.⁸⁸ Others have voiced the opposite view: that, even after the conquest of northern Italy, Constantine did not have the upper hand, and that in fact, with every day of his stay in enemy territory, his position grew worse.⁸⁹ No convincing arguments, let alone evidence, can be put forward for either of these claims. Boiling it down, we could say that Constantine's position was good, but Maxentius' was far better. Constantine was still advancing and cities were opening their gates to him, so any losses were probably light and were evidently being replaced by defectors; Maxentius, though, had a trump card up his sleeve: Rome itself. All he had to do was stick to the tactic of choice he had deployed in the campaigns against Severus and Galerius five years earlier, which was to seal himself in Rome and let the enemy try to besiege it. In fact, a siege appears to have been Constantine's only option. He had to take control of the city and oust Maxentius; if he failed, he could not hope to become ruler of the West. Then, it would be Licinius' turn. Although we do not know how many of Maxentius' troops had switched sides in the meantime, it is doubtful whether Constantine would have succeeded in encircling Rome at all: the circumference of its Aurelian Walls ran for 18 km. We have already seen that Galerius failed in 307, and Constantine had even had difficulty in encircling Verona completely. The formidable Aurelian Walls had been strengthened and improved over the intervening years and attempts to breach them by force would have been expensive, with no guarantee of success. But if Constantine failed to besiege Rome and thus cut off its supplies, it would have lacked strategic sense to linger there at all; indeed, there would have been no point in embarking on

⁸⁸ Barnes (2014, 81) boldly claims that "the war was won" when Constantine took control of northern Italy.

⁸⁹ Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 34–35.

the Italian campaign in the first place. Even if Constantine succeeded in encircling Rome, there was no telling whether Maxentius might then be handed the initiative. The view that, despite his victorious campaign in northern Italy, Constantine was outnumbered 2:1⁹⁰ at Rome, and that Maxentius could have forced Constantine to fight whenever he wanted by simply storming out of the city, seems about right. And there were other matters that were undoubtedly niggling Constantine by the time he was approaching the city. How would he keep the army fed and watered? How would he maintain morale if he was facing several months of stand-off at Rome? The worst-case scenario was that his army would start twiddling its thumbs at Rome and then gradually fall apart as the soldiers deserted. In the end, Constantine's own troops would likely do away with him. In fact, the panegyric recited in 313 says the siege of Rome was the worst fear Constantine could have had. Maxentius had prepared well for the siege and had had supplies brought into the city that would supposedly last "for an unlimited time" (*infiniti temporis annonam congesserat*).⁹¹ If Maxentius did not want to fight Constantine, he simply would not have to.

And yet Maxentius changed his mind and did something inexplicable: on 28 October 312, he marched out of Rome with an army to face Constantine in open battle—and lost. Pat Southern rightly says that it was a mistake for Maxentius to let Constantine get so far into Italy without stopping him, and that, now Constantine had arrived, Maxentius should have stayed in Rome and not gone into battle.⁹² The panegyric of 313 explains that he tore up his original plan after being induced to do so by "the divine spirit and the eternal majesty of the City itself" (*divina mens et ipsius Urbis aeterna maiestas*).⁹³ Eusebius says much the same, only from a Christian point of view: "God himself dragged the tyrant far outside the gates, as if bound by fetters", according to the bishop.⁹⁴ The panegyric of 321 is not much help either, simply informing us that Maxentius was

⁹⁰ This is the opinion put forward by Odahl (2013, 104–105), but Potter (2013, 143) is less sure ("Maxentius commanded an army whose men knew that they were probably overmatched").

⁹¹ *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 16, 1.

⁹² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 175.

⁹³ *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 16, 2.

⁹⁴ Euseb. *HE* IX, 9, 4; Eusebius used very similar wording elsewhere (*VC* I, 38, 1).

“driven out of the city by a divine power” (*vis divinitatis*)⁹⁵; it is worth noting here the religious vagueness that we will be encountering again. A little further on, the author of the panegyric offers more details: Maxentius is said to have been deranged with fear (*animum iam metu devium*), i.e. of Constantine; he was driven out of the city by a god hostile to him, and the time came for Maxentius to die (*infestior deus et pereundi maturitas perpulisset*). More valuable is the observation as to how Maxentius had deployed his army because it shows that the emperor must really have gone mad (*ipsa ratio disponendi exercitus docuit illum mente perditam*): his soldiers had their backs to the river and nowhere to retreat to.⁹⁶ How could Maxentius have been so rash?

The battle site itself is a bit of a mystery. Let’s start with a seemingly minor detail: the name of the bridge where the lion’s share of the battle is said to have taken place. Although the vast majority of modern scholars (Potter, Barnes, Pohlsander, Stephenson, Lenski, Clauss, Drake, and Southern) call it the Milvian Bridge, Odahl reminds us that the correct name is the Mulvian Bridge.⁹⁷ This was a stone bridge already over 400 years old in Constantine’s time,⁹⁸ hence we find it mentioned—always as the *pons Mulvius*—by a number of older writers (e.g. Cicero, Tacitus, and Sallust). The name in scholarly publications (and also, for example, on Wikipedia) may have been influenced by the current name of this bridge in Italian (*ponte Milvio*), as the bridge in question still exists. Another reason may be that one of our sources, Aurelius Victor, does actually refer to the “Milvian Bridge”. Victor is behind another confusing piece of information: he says that the battle took place not at the bridge, but at the village of Saxa Rubra (“Red Rocks”) “about 9 miles” from Rome, more precisely about 7 km north of the Mulvian Bridge, which is actually the place to which the defeated Maxentius retreated; here he “succumbed in crossing the Tiber to the snares which he had laid in advance for his enemy at the Milvian Bridge” (*insidiis, quas hosti apud*

⁹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 27, 5.

⁹⁶ *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 28, 1.

⁹⁷ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 107, note 16. The name “Milvian” is so ingrained that it is even used in the English translation of Eutropius (X, 4), even though Eutropius referred to the bridge as Mulvius.

⁹⁸ It was built by the consul and censor Aemilius Scaurus at the end of the second century BCE; see *De viris illustribus urbis Romae* 72.

pontem Milvium locaverat, in transgressu Tiberis interceptus est).⁹⁹ Some modern scholars accept this interpretation.¹⁰⁰ It is indeed possible that the main clash occurred a little further north of the Mulvian Bridge, as the terrain at the bridge probably did not allow Maxentius' troops to be moved into position properly. Alternatively, Victor may be wrong. He had mentioned a battle at the "Milvian Bridge" earlier in his work in connection with the end of the reign of Didius Julianus, who was said to have been defeated by Septimius Severus on this very structure.¹⁰¹ However, that battle was a fiction; Didius Julianus was killed by his own men. It is therefore possible that Victor confused these events in his work.

The *Epitome* is another source that calls it the Mulvian—not the Milvian—Bridge when describing the battle. However, the battle was not actually about this structure. The *Epitome* tells us of a pontoon bridge made of boats (*in pontem navigiis compositum*), at (or on) which the emperor, hurrying away, was thrown into the river by his horse. This bridge stood "a little further up the river from the Mulvian Bridge" (*paulo superius a ponte Mulvio*).¹⁰² We can see, then, that the *Epitome* refines Victor's interpretation considerably: the battle on the Tiber took place not at a stone bridge, but at an improvised bridge that Maxentius had built beforehand. He had had the Mulvian Bridge (and presumably other bridges across the Tiber) severed as part of his fortification work to make Constantine's already difficult mission—to besiege Rome—that much harder. Once again, we must ask ourselves the pressing question of why Maxentius changed his mind and, instead of letting his opponent besiege Rome, he marched his army to confront him in battle. Were the "snares" mentioned by Aurelius Victor the pontoon bridge? And were they linked to Maxentius' change of plan?

Other sources describing the battle usually do not name, or in some cases even mention, the bridge.¹⁰³ Lactantius, for instance, speaks of a bridge, but does not name it. He says that Maxentius initially stayed put

⁹⁹ Aur. Vict. 40, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 69–70; Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Aur. Vict. 19, 4. This account is repeated by Eutropius (VIII, 17) and the *Orosius* (VII, 16, 6). The original source here may be the *Kaisergeschichte*.

¹⁰² *Epitome* 40, 7.

¹⁰³ Exceptions include Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* I, 2), who mentions that the battle took place at the Mulvian Bridge, and Eutropius (X, 4), who says the same (*apud pontem*

in Rome because “he received a prophecy that he would perish if he went out of the gates of the city” (*responsum acceperat periturum esse si extra portas urbis exisset*). The strategic considerations outlined above must have played more of a role in shaping the emperor’s thinking. Much worse is the fact that Lactantius’ account of Maxentius’ conduct at the time of the battle is downright preposterous. Lactantius tells his readers that the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge had already begun when rioting broke out in Rome, forcing Maxentius to take his early leave of the circensian games he had organised in celebration of the approaching anniversary of his reign. He then found time to consult the Sibylline Oracles, according to which the enemy of the Romans would perish that day (*repertum est illo die hostem Romanorum esse periturum*), before leaving the city to join a battle that was already in full swing.¹⁰⁴ There is no way the emperor would have behaved so erratically, not to mention the fact that it is almost 3 km from the northernmost gate of the Aurelian Walls (the *porta Flaminia*) to the Mulvian Bridge. It would thus have taken the emperor at least an hour to leave the games and, after consulting with the priests, ride the *via Flaminia* to the battlefield; other sources, however, suggest that the battle “seems not to have lasted very long”.¹⁰⁵ Nor does the rest of Lactantius’ description make much sense. Maxentius, we are told, set out against Constantine across a bridge that was apparently a pontoon bridge, as Lactantius says that “the bridge behind his back was broken” (*pons a tergo eius scinditur*), but the text is not specific on this point. When Maxentius arrived on the battlefield, Constantine—with divine assistance, needless to say—began to win. “Maxentius fled in haste to the broken bridge” (*ipse in fugam versus properat ad pontem, qui interruptus erat*). A pontoon bridge that was broken and could not offer a safe route out was of no use to him or his soldiers. Nevertheless, they all pressed on to it, and “the bridge, straining with the multitude of those fleeing, collapsed into the river” (*multitudine fugientium pressus in Tiberim deturbatur*).¹⁰⁶ Lactantius at least agrees with the *Epitome* that Maxentius perished as he fled.

Mulvium). The *Origo* (12) simply records that Maxentius marched out of Rome and was thrown into the river by a horse while fleeing the battle.

¹⁰⁴ Lact. *mort. pers.* 44, 7–9.

¹⁰⁵ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 320. This is very briefly noted by *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 30, 2 (*pugna raptim gesta*).

¹⁰⁶ Lact. *mort. pers.* 44, 9.

Zosimus offers a rather clearer interpretation. After Constantine reached Rome, Maxentius remained in the city and examined the Sibylline and other oracles. Having found the prophecy we have already mentioned (that an enemy of the Romans would perish on that day), he took this to mean his adversary and thus marched his army out of the city and into battle. This cost him his life.¹⁰⁷ Even here, Maxentius' decision is not satisfactorily explained, but at least we no longer have the image of the emperor rushing to the battlefield in order to catch the fight before it was over. As for the bridge, it was again a pontoon bridge, and here too Zosimus' narrative is more coherent: "in the middle of the river, the two parts of the bridge were connected to each other at the point of contact by iron bolts which were pulled out whenever someone did not want the bridge to be connected".¹⁰⁸ Only now do we understand what Victor, the *Epitome*, and Lactantius told us: that Maxentius had set a trap for his rival. Zosimus' account is confirmed by Eusebius, who mentions a pontoon bridge connected by ships which Maxentius had built as a *ruse de guerre*. This bridge was supposed to be the death of Constantine, but Maxentius and his men so overloaded the bridge on their retreat that it collapsed, and the emperor and his bodyguard, probably because of their heavy armour, "sank like a stone".¹⁰⁹

We can thus accept, as a working hypothesis, that Maxentius may have originally had all the bridges across the Tiber severed and that he had made ready for a long siege, but later he or someone in his entourage had the idea of killing Constantine and his retinue by having them ride on to a pontoon bridge that would collapse into the river and take them with it. This plan, however, required not only the preparation of a complicated pontoon bridge mechanism, but also a feigned raid from the city against Constantine, whom they needed to take the bait. Whatever the details of the planned ruse, matters plainly went awry, and either at Saxa Rubra or the Mulvian Bridge, Maxentius became embroiled in a battle he did not want to fight and suffered a swift defeat. Instead of an orderly retreat across the rickety pontoon that Maxentius had planned to demolish, his panic-stricken army rushed the bridge, which could not hold them and plunged into the river. Naturally, we can dispense with the tweaking of the

¹⁰⁷ Zos. II, 16, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Zos. II, 15, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Euseb. *HE* IX, 9, 5.

story by Zosimus and Eusebius and simply assume that Maxentius had no plan to demolish the bridge. It changes nothing.¹¹⁰ The only question that remains to be answered is: why did Maxentius himself take part in the raid? Why did he take the risk?

Let's go back to Lactantius' account for a moment. The most valuable aspect of it is the innocent reference to the fact that an insurrection had broken out in the city (*fit in urbe seditio*). Uprisings can arise spontaneously, but they can also be instigated. The first overt manifestation of rebellion was during the circensian games, when the people, as one, yelled that Constantine was invincible (*populus una voce subclamat Constantinum vinci non posse*). This may have been some sort of rallying cry spread among the inhabitants of Rome by Constantine's agents. On a related note, pretty much the same slogan ("Constantius is invincible!") was shouted by the soldiers of Constantine's son Constantine II after his victory over the Sarmatians in 359.¹¹¹ As we have mentioned, Constantine clearly approached the campaign against Maxentius not only as a military leader, but also as a politician. Trying to instigate a revolt against Maxentius was the most sensible thing he could do in the circumstances.¹¹² And if he did manage to plant his men incognito in Rome itself to incite the people against Maxentius, theirs was hardly a mission impossible: by 312 Maxentius had lost the support of Rome's populace by acts that included "frenziedly subjecting the nobility of Rome to various kinds of death".¹¹³ In this light, Maxentius' decision not to stay in the hotbed that was now Rome, but to march against Constantine, is understandable. However, he was not exactly oozing with confidence because, before leaving, he had the imperial insignia buried in wooden chests on the Palatine, which were found by Italian archaeologists in 2006.¹¹⁴ He is said to have moved out of the palace two days before the battle, taking

¹¹⁰ Barnes (1981, 43) goes so far as to suggest that Maxentius, seeing that the battle was lost, threw himself into the river in his armour on horseback in order to drown and thus avoid the ignominy of capture. This is another possibility that cannot be ruled out.

¹¹¹ Amm. Marc. XVII, 13, 33 (*non posse Constantium vinci*).

¹¹² Constantine may have relied on a similar ploy in 310 at Marseilles, where Maximian had entrenched himself against him; the townspeople were remarkably quick to open the gates and hand Maximian over to Constantine.

¹¹³ Eutr. X, 4, 4 (*Romae adversum nobiles omnibus exitiis saevientem*).

¹¹⁴ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 142.

his wife Valeria Maximilla and his son away and entrusting them to the protection of a private individual, evidently a trusted friend.¹¹⁵

We have seen how, in the previous six years Constantine had repeatedly shown that he was as good a warrior as he was a politician. His Italian campaign only reaffirmed that. This was his greatest military and political achievement to date. The day after the battle, on 29 October 312, Constantine and his troops entered Rome. The head of Maxentius, his body fished from the Tiber, had been chopped off, impaled on a spear, and paraded through the city's streets. It is not clear whether Constantine did actually celebrate his victory with anything resembling a triumph (*triumphus*). It would have been unusual, to say the least, because triumphs over Roman citizens were not usually celebrated; besides, there was no time to prepare for a real ceremony.¹¹⁶ In any event, there was some sort of hastily prepared celebration.¹¹⁷ Some scholars also maintain that Constantine refused to ascend the Capitol and perform a sacrifice in homage and thanks to Jupiter.¹¹⁸ However, our only source here is Zosimus, and he is giving an account of 326, not 312.¹¹⁹ After the celebration, Maxentius' head was taken to Africa to convince local officials

¹¹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 16, 5 (*in privatam domum*).

¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, some scholars have insisted that, technically speaking, there was indeed a *triumphus*: these include Lenski (2007, 70), Odahl (2013, 108), and initially Barnes (1981, 44) and Potter (2013: 145) only vaguely refers to a "ceremonial entry". Barnes (2014, 99) later rejected altogether the possibility of a *triumphus*.

¹¹⁷ The main source, the panegyric of 313, mentions only some of the attributes of a *triumphus*: *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 18, 3 (*ioci triumphales*).

¹¹⁸ Potter (2013, 145) believed that Constantine's refusal was intended to distance him from the cult of Jupiter that was so firmly wedded to the past regime (Diocletian's tetrarchy); Barnes (2014, 99), on the other hand, thought it was borne more of political tact—this was the final act of a civil war, and thus there was nothing to celebrate.

¹¹⁹ *Zos.* II, 29, 5. Zosimus here may have conflated several occasions when Constantine was in Rome. With this in mind, some scholars have considered whether his account actually refers to the year 315, during which Constantine celebrated his *decennalia*, or to 326, when he celebrated his *vicennalia* (see Clauss, 1996, 9; Lee, 2007, 171; Nixon & Rodgers, 2015, 324; Ridley, 1982, 157). The only other hint that Constantine refused to perform pagan rites in 312 is that the panegyric of 313 does not mention the fact that Constantine ascended the Capitol; on the other hand, nor does it say that he did not ascend the Capitol. All it says is that the people moaned that Constantine repaired to the palace too soon (*Pan. Lat.* XII [9], 19, 3: *tam cito accessisse palatium*), but this was all in a day's work for a professional panegyric writer: the orator is simply explaining that the throngs of people could not get enough of Constantine. Another argument is that the panegyrist may not have known all the facts about Constantine's first day in Rome.

and commanders that Constantine was now ruler of Italy and all the West. Other than that, Constantine satisfied himself with execution of only a handful of Maxentius' men; he even retained others in their official positions. In return, the senate declared Constantine first among *augusti*, i.e. it accorded him the most honourable status in the imperial college.¹²⁰ The senate also damned Maxentius' memory (i.e. he suffered *damnatio memoriae*); this explains why Maxentius is not named in the celebratory panegyric of 313 or on the Arch of Constantine (see below).¹²¹ In Rome, Constantine abolished both the praetorian guard and the *equites singulares Augusti* (the elite cavalry arm, on which see Chapter 3) and dispatched soldiers to the Rhine and Danube to guard the frontiers.¹²²

For all the tributes and favours showered by Constantine on the senate and the people of Rome, the city would never again be the imperial capital, and after Maxentius no usurper or emperor would reside there for a very long time. As we saw in the previous chapter, even under the first tetrarchy there were imperial residences in six to eight important cities across the empire, but Rome was not one of them. It had been denuded of its strategic importance.¹²³ On the other hand, it remained the seat of the senate and the centre of the empire's political, religious, and cultural traditions. At this point in time, it was also an important source of Constantine's legitimacy. The city was impossible to ignore. This is reflected in Constantine's visits to Rome. The first time, he spent three months at most here, from 29 October 312 to January 313. His second visit lasted from the end of July to the end of September 315,

Finally, the whole panegyric is odd in that the orator avoids any specific mention of the gods (see below).

¹²⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 44, 11 (*senatus Constantino [...] primi nominis titulum decrevit*). The previous order of Maximinus—Constantine—Licinius was thus changed to Constantine—Maximinus—Licinius.

¹²¹ He may not be specified by name, but he still features quite prominently in the panegyric. As we have seen above (note 1032), Constantine not only had Maxentius' memory condemned, but also had it proclaimed that Maxentius was not actually Maximian's son. It is here, in the panegyric of 313, that this claim first appears, with the orator saying that Maxentius was the "planted" son of Maximian; see *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 4, 3 (*Maximiani suppositus*). Constantine evidently did this precisely so that he could later rehabilitate Maximian; see Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 301) ("Maximian appears to have been on the road to rehabilitation, now that his son was dead").

¹²² *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 21, 2–3.

¹²³ Corcoran, "Before Constantine", 44.

during which time he celebrated his *decennalia*. He was here a third time, to celebrate his *vicennalia*, from the end of July to August 326. After that, though, he never went to Rome again.¹²⁴ In all, he spent about half a year in Rome, with each visit shorter than the one before.

THE “EDICT OF MILAN”

Constantine and Licinius met in Milan, perhaps sometime in early February 313,¹²⁵ to discuss the practicalities involved in dividing the empire. Timothy Barnes specifies two items that were most likely on the agenda: the completion of the process of setting up dioceses (on this, see Chapter 4), which were now split equally between the two emperors (six dioceses each), and the establishment of the office of *magister officiorum*. Initially, the plan was for this official to be a kind of “superior” overseeing the imperial offices (*officia*), but in reality he acquired much more authority over time (see Chapter 10).¹²⁶ Constantine also saw the meeting as an opportunity to hold a wedding: it was time to make good on his promise from a year or so earlier that he would give Licinius his sister Constantia in marriage.

What was not on the agenda, however, was the status of Italy, which, according to Galerius’ original decision, should have belonged to Licinius, but which Constantine had conquered for himself (and, as we have seen, this matter appears to have been settled between Constantine and Licinius beforehand, perhaps as early as 311). Also missing from the agenda was the “Edict of Milan”. This is a persistent fallacy of modern historiography. A myriad of present-day scholars have been at pains to point out, largely to no avail, that the text as it survives is not an edict and did not come from Milan.¹²⁷ Nor, we might add, was it issued by Constantine. There was no need to promulgate or publish any edict on religious toleration at

¹²⁴ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 71–77.

¹²⁵ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 71. Seeck (1919, 160) places the Milan meeting in the second half of January or the first half of February.

¹²⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 91. Clauss (1981, 13) believes that this office was most likely created in 314.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Barnes (2014, 94), Bleckmann (2007, 22), Lenski (2007, 72), Drake (2007, 121), Pohlsander (2004, 25), and Potter (2013, 149). Nevertheless, the “Edict of Milan” is commonly referred to by others (Southern, 2004, 175; Stephenson, 2010, 158; and curiously also Drake, 2000, 193).

the Milan meeting for the simple reason that it would have been superfluous. Thanks to measures introduced by the emperor Galerius, there should have been religious toleration throughout the empire from 311; the subjects of Constantine (and until recently Maxentius) had enjoyed religious toleration since as early as 306. The situation in the Eastern part of the empire was rather more complex. Licinius had respected Galerius' proclamation of religious toleration, but Maximinus (according to Lactantius) declared it null and void in his territories and actually began to persecute Christians again. Because Maximinus' relations with both Constantine and Licinius were hostile, he would simply ignore anything solemnly proclaimed in Milan. Hence, Constantine and Licinius concentrated on political and administrative matters (and the wedding) in Milan. When it came to religious issues, they actually had nothing to discuss. For the moment, the most that could emerge from such talks was one practical measure: that property in Licinius' territory in the Balkans would be restored to those Christians who had previously been persecuted there (as this had been overlooked by Galerius' edict in 311). Licinius therefore evidently went on to issue such orders, but we are not informed of them. As for the status of Christians in the West, nothing at all required changing and therefore there was no need to promulgate anything.¹²⁸

Only when Licinius later defeated Maximinus and took control of the whole of the East would it make sense to promulgate what is today incorrectly referred to as the "Edict of Milan". All that has been preserved for us under that name is a subsequently published letter from Licinius telling the governors of the provinces in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt formerly controlled by Maximinus that not only were the Christians in those areas no longer to be persecuted, but that their confiscated property was also to be returned to them. This meant that the measures, having been put into force initially in the West and then in the Balkans, now finally had validity across the empire. The letter was published in Nicomedia on 13 June 313. The only mystifying thing about it is perhaps that the text begins with a joint declaration by the two *augusti* mentioning their Milan meeting—as if either the letter had been issued in Milan or Constantine had been in Nicomedia at the time. The text has been preserved in Greek by Eusebius

¹²⁸ Constantine had only found it necessary, in early 313, to order the African proconsul Anullinus to return to the local Christians the property that had been seized from them during the persecutions of 303–305 (Euseb. *HE* X, 5, 15; see Clarke, 2008, 652–653).

and in Latin by Lactantius.¹²⁹ However, no such thing as the “Edict of Milan” ever existed.

Realising he could expect nothing but an attack from the West now that Maxentius was dead and Constantine and Licinius had forged a firm alliance, Maximinus decided to strike first. In April 313, he crossed from Asia Minor into Europe and occupied Byzantium. He then headed west towards Heracleia, but was defeated by Licinius in the Battle of Tzirallum, which was fought at a place called Campus Ergenus, near Adrianople in Thrace, on 30 April 313. He had no choice but to return to Asia Minor and then flee further east, via Nicomedia, to Cappadocia (in May). He subsequently committed suicide (in July or August, at Tarsus in Cilicia).¹³⁰ Licinius inflicted *damnatio memoriae* on Maximinus and slew all surviving members of the “extended tetrarchic family”: Galerius’ widow Valeria, her mother Prisca, her stepson Candidianus, and Severianus, the son of the emperor Severus. In addition, Maximinus’ wife was drowned in the Orontes River and both of Maximinus’ children were executed, as were a number of Maximinus’ men who had been most to blame for the persecution of Christians.¹³¹ However, the main reasons for this massacre were political—Licinius appears to have drawn lessons from the crisis of 305, when both Constantine and Maxentius, the sons of the two *augusti*, were overlooked in the appointment of emperors and were left to live as private citizens, but later usurped imperial power.¹³² As for Diocletian, he was perhaps still living in his palace in Salona and probably died in late 313. However, the year of his death poses a puzzle that Appendix E attempts to solve.

Meanwhile, in the West, rather less dramatic events were taking place. After the meeting in Milan, Constantine returned to Gaul sometime in the spring and once again took up residence in Trier. Halfway through 313, he defeated the Franks on the Lower Rhine. The author of the panegyric provides details, noting that the Franks “broke their promise” and chose leaders for an invasion. Constantine, receiving word that the Rhine was being crossed by their warriors, immediately marched against them

¹²⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 48, 2–12; Euseb. *HE* X, 5, 4.

¹³⁰ July, says Barnes (1982, 67); August, counters Lenski (2007, 73).

¹³¹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 50–51. Leadbetter (2009, 243) ends his book with the fitting conclusion that “Thus, the Jovian line, the families of both Diocletian and Galerius, were wiped out. But Licinius did not profit from it. Constantine did”.

¹³² Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 54.

(presumably from Trier), and his presence alone was enough to drive them back across the river. Unsatisfied with this, as the barbarians had deprived him of victory, the emperor pretended that he and his army had to retire to Upper Germania to put down another invasion. As soon as the Franks fell for this ruse, his troops, which he had left in hiding on the spot, attacked the barbarians while a Roman fleet arrived to cut off their retreat. Constantine then struck the Franks with the full force of his army and killed or captured many of the warriors, whereupon he himself crossed the Rhine, invading and laying waste to the land of the barbarians. He had his captives march in a triumphal procession in Trier, and then, as was his wont, he cast them to the beasts in the amphitheatre.¹³³

It was here in Trier, during the games held in honour of his victory over Maxentius, that he heard a panegyric in which the anonymous orator summed up both his Italian campaign and his fresh victory over the Franks. This panegyric is interesting from a religious point of view because, unlike previous panegyrics, the orator here avoided any reference to the gods, even though he was clearly a pagan himself. Much had changed since the panegyrics on Constantine delivered in Trier in 307, 310, and 311, which had contained abundant references to specific pagan gods.¹³⁴ This time, the panegyrist refers vaguely to a supreme god, whom he addresses as “the creator of all things, who has as many names as many languages you have allowed to exist” (*summe rerum sator, cuius tot nomina sunt quot gentium linguas esse voluisti*).¹³⁵ Just as vaguely, Licinius’ soldiers are said to have prayed to the “supreme god” (*deus summus*) before battling Maximinus on 30 April 313.¹³⁶

One of the most famous inscriptions extant from the time of Constantine is also ambiguous. In 315, Constantine went to Rome to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his reign (his *decennalia*). On this occasion, a

¹³³ *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 22–23. Constantine may have refused to celebrate his triumph over Maxentius at Rome, but he made up for it now by rejoicing in his victory over the Franks at Trier. According to *Chron.* 354 (in Mommsen, 1863, 346) the celebrations (*Iudi Francici*) took place on 15–20 July.

¹³⁴ The panegyric of 310 is particularly significant, as Apollo features here as Constantine’s protector. The author of the panegyric of 313, by contrast, knows nothing of Constantine’s vision or the dream the emperor is said to have had before the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge (see Appendix D). See also Barnes (2014, 99).

¹³⁵ *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 26, 1.

¹³⁶ *Lact. mort. pers.* 46, 3–11.

triumphal arch—still standing close to the Colosseum—was dedicated to Constantine. The dedicatory inscription on the arch is religiously vague by design. It says that this triumphal arch was dedicated to Constantine by the senate and the people of Rome because the emperor and his army, inspired by the divine (*instinctu divinitatis*) and by the greatness of his mind, triumphed over the tyrant and his followers.¹³⁷

From a numismatic point of view, too, the period after the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge appears to be religiously traditional or neutral; it is almost as if Constantine were hiding his Christian beliefs. Starting in 306, Mars is a favourite on his coins, though other deities are also common.¹³⁸ In 310, the god *Sol* comes to the fore. This is typical of the Illyrian emperors, especially Aurelian, and also of Constantine's father, Constantius.¹³⁹ Constantine was portrayed on the coinage as a companion of *Sol*, whose protection he claimed (most often with the legend *Soli Invicto Comiti*). What may seem baffling is the fact that *Sol* continues to appear on Constantine's coins in 319.¹⁴⁰ Constantine's coins from this period are thus another indicator that he was leaning towards religious indeterminacy, continuity, and only gradual change.¹⁴¹ As late as 321, Nazarius, the rhetorician from Bordeaux, reminded his audience in Rome (albeit in the emperor's absence) that a heavenly army in shining armour—led, the orator believed, by Constantine's late father, the divine Constantius—had come to Constantine's aid in the Italian campaign.¹⁴²

A gold coin, or rather a medallion (worth nine *solidi*), with a double portrait of Constantine and a god bearing a striking resemblance to Constantine, was struck in Ticinum (present-day Pavia) in early 313. Both figures are shown in profile, looking to the left, the emperor in the foreground, the god partially overlapped behind him (i.e. standing at

¹³⁷ *ILS* 694. Maxentius, suffering from *damnatio memoriae*, is not named here. Van Dam (2008, 30) notes that, despite the religious ambiguity, the arch is traditional in its iconography: there are several depictions of Constantine performing a sacrifice.

¹³⁸ Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 39–43.

¹³⁹ For a comparison of the coinage of Aurelian and Constantine portraying the sun god, see Potter (2013, 177).

¹⁴⁰ The Arles mint even continued to issue these coins until 323 (Barnes, 2014, 18).

¹⁴¹ Pohlsander (2004, 42) says that “The coinage is thus, like Constantine's policy, ambiguous, giving evidence not of a sudden conversion but only of a gradually changing attitude”.

¹⁴² *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 14.

the emperor's right side). The emperor is armoured and wearing a laurel wreath; the god is portrayed with the rayed-crown typical for depictions of *Sol*. The inscription on the obverse—"Invincible Constantine, the greatest emperor" (INVICTVS CONSTANTINUS MAX AVG)—is no help to us in identifying Constantine's companion. Although it is generally accepted that the sun god *Sol* is depicted, some believe that this is a syncretic rendering of a sun god who is identical to Apollo. Another very similar gold medallion, with almost identical imagery, was struck in Ticinum in 315 or 316.¹⁴³ If we take Constantine's companion to be Apollo, then this depiction could refer to Constantine's "pagan vision" of 310, which featured Apollo (see Appendix D).

The silver medallion designed for the *decennalia*, also struck in Ticinum in 315, might be viewed as a departure of sorts from this standard path and tradition. The obverse portrays Constantine in military armour, bridling a horse. Curiously, the emperor is not shown in profile; instead, we are looking him in the face. In his other hand he holds a shield, on which we can clearly see the famous Capitoline wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. Constantine's helmet bears a symbol appearing on a Roman coin for the first time that is generally interpreted as the sacred monogram (described in Appendix D), i.e. a ligature of the Greek letters chi and rho.¹⁴⁴ Behind the emperor is a symbol in which, if we put our minds to it, we might see a cross and orb, but this is disputed.¹⁴⁵ It is therefore, at best, an amalgamation of pagan and Christian motifs. Manfred Clauss points out that all the artefacts discussed here are not coins, but limited-run commemorative medallions having very little social impact. The importance of the silver medallion, in particular, should not be overinflated: only three specimens are extant and the symbol on Constantine's helmet is tiny; whatever it expressed, it was hardly recognisable to the naked eye ("Was auch immer das Zeichen am Helm

¹⁴³ For more on the identification of the image with the sun god and Apollo, see Drake (2000, 182). This is also discussed by Stephenson (2010, 157–158) and Clauss (1996, 102–103). The first medallion is discussed by Sutherland (1967, 277–278). The second medallion is dated by Bruun (1966, 363; see also Plate 9, No. 32) to the autumn of 315.

¹⁴⁴ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 144–146; Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 42.

¹⁴⁵ As Bleckmann (2007, 20) says, "Whether the images behind the shield are really supposed to represent a Christian cross-scepter remains a subject of debate".

bedeuten sollte, es war mit blosser Auge kaum zu erkennen"). Claus also believes that none of these medallions can be dated with precision.¹⁴⁶ It really must be underlined that these medallions were not intended for circulation, but were meant as personal rewards to the emperor's loyal collaborators. And that these rare pieces depicting uncertain Christian themes are mere islets in a vast ocean of entirely pagan coins.

Although Constantine was undoubtedly leaning towards Christianity and supporting the Christian church at this time, this was not accompanied by the imposition of any restrictions on pagan cults. For the time being, he ruled only half of the empire, and the half where Christianity had made less headway at that. It would have been politically foolhardy to antagonise the majority pagan population or even the senate.¹⁴⁷ We might call Constantine's approach "political pragmatism". Noel Lenski points out, however, that by now Constantine was making his Christian sentiments abundantly clear in other ways. For instance, during the three months he spent in Rome, he began the construction of many Christian churches.¹⁴⁸ Another example is his involvement in a dispute among bishops in the West related to Donatism.

The roots of this problem lay in North Africa at the time of the Great Persecution, during which some bishops handed over sacred books and objects to their persecutors, earning themselves the label *traditores*. The dispute centred on whether decisions made by these bishops while they were in office, such as baptisms, would remain valid. The rigorists argued that these actions were null and void and had to be redone; the moderates took the opposite view. The dispute escalated on a personal level when the rigorists refused to recognise the election of Caecilian as the bishop of Carthage, claiming that one of the bishops who had put Caecilian in office was a *traditor* and therefore Caecilian's election was not valid. When both sides appealed to Constantine in the spring of 313, the emperor decided that the case would be heard in Rome by the local bishop Miltiades and eighteen other bishops. Caecilian won the dispute, and when the rigorists,

¹⁴⁶ Claus, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 102–103.

¹⁴⁷ Lee, "Traditional Religions", 171.

¹⁴⁸ Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 71–72. For a comprehensive list of these structures, see Barnes (2014, 85–88). Pohlsander (2004, 39) reminds us that Constantine's building programme reflected his political agenda: as the emperor wished to promote Christianity without provoking open conflict with paganism, he had all church buildings in Rome built outside the centre and away from pagan temples.

led by Bishop Donatus, appealed, Constantine called a council at Arles for the following year (314). This was not the first time an emperor had intervened in a dispute between bishops: he was preceded in this respect by Aurelian. Moreover, as *pontifex maximus*, Constantine had every right to get involved in any religious matter in his part of the empire. Even so, this was the first time in history that an emperor had convened a synod of bishops (and even attended it himself as a layman). The synod of Arles found in favour of the moderates, as did Constantine's decision in Milan in 315. By the end of 316, Constantine had lost patience with the Donatists and issued a letter ordering the *vicarius Africae* (the head of the African diocese) to seize their property and send their leaders into exile. Thus began the further persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, five years after the pagan emperor Galerius had declared complete religious toleration.¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁹ For more insight into Donatism and its further development, see Potter (2004, 409–410), Drake (2007, 116–120), Pohlsander (2004, 31–34), Češka (2000, 57–58), Harries (2012, 168–170), and Van Dam (2008, 263–264).

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Licinius

THE FIRST WAR WITH LICINIUS

On the surface, relations between the two *augusti* following their meeting in Milan may have seemed a model of perfect harmony, but tension was coursing underneath. Certainly, Constantine and Licinius held the consulship together on several occasions (in 312, 313, and 315), they appeared together on coins, and in the summer of 315 Licinius and Constantia had a son they named Licinius,¹ an event that should have strengthened the bond between the two emperors, but instead was rapidly twisted into at least one of the reasons for the sudden rift between them. Constantine may not have been expecting Constantia to bear a child so quickly into her marriage with Licinius, not to mention the fact that it would be a son. He and Fausta, on the other hand, were still childless after nine years of marriage. To be sure, Crispus was growing into a young man by now (for more on his age, see below), but he would always be an illegitimate son, probably—as we have discussed—the result of an informal relationship with a concubine. Be that as it may, it was at this time (perhaps about 315) that Constantine had Crispus educated by the eminent Latin rhetorician Lactantius, probably in Trier, so he clearly had plans for him

¹ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 40. On the birth of Licinius' son: *Epitome* 41, 4; Zos. II, 20, 2.

in the future. His main concern right now, however, was to do whatever necessary to prevent Licinius' son from becoming *caesar*. He had plainly resolved that the empire would belong entirely to him and his line.

In this light, Constantine's turns of diplomacy in 315,² which only the *Origo* tells us about,³ make sense. Constantine arranged to have his sister Anastasia married to a senator by the name of Bassianus. Constantine then dispatched one Constantius as a negotiator to Licinius with the job of persuading him to elevate Bassianus to the rank of *caesar* in Italy (*Constantium Constantinus ad Licinium misit, persuadens ut Bassianus Caesar fieret*). More precisely, he was suggesting that "following the precedent of Diocletian and Maximian, Bassianus should rule Italy in the middle between Constantine and Licinius" (*ut exemplo Diocletiani et Maximiani inter Constantinum et Licinium Bassianus Italiam medius obtineret*). Barnes contemplates quite seriously whether this Constantius may have been the brother of Constantine and Anastasia, i.e. a son of the emperor Constantius I and Theodora (as we know, Constantius I had six children by his marriage to Theodora: Flavius Dalmatius, Julius Constantius, Hannibalianus, Constantia, Anastasia, and Eutropia).⁴ A beguiling hypothesis, it is supported by the way the *Origo* speaks of Constantius: he is not characterised at all, as though no introduction were necessary because everyone already knew who he was. Assuming this Constantius was indeed Constantine's brother, this would also have made him the brother-in-law of both Bassianus and Licinius, and therefore the perfect negotiator for such a sensitive matter. And yet his young age raises question marks. We know that Constantine's brother Constantius (like all his siblings) must have been born after their father Constantius' marriage to Theodora, which probably took place in 293. He would thus have been a tender 20 years old in 315.⁵

² This is the year put forward by Barnes (2014, 102), but there are also arguments in favour of 316.

³ *Origo* 5, 14–15.

⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 212; Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 66. Odahl (2013, 163) is absolutely sure that this was Constantine's half-brother; *PLRE I* (224–225), on the other hand, does not entertain this idea in the slightest.

⁵ Barnes, however, reckons that Constantius I and Theodora were married as early as 289, which means their son Constantius could have been older. Little is known about this Constantius, except that he was the father of the *caesar* Gallus and the emperor Julian, that he became consul and patrician in 335, and that he was executed in 337 (see Chapter 11).

Barnes also speculates that Constantine's thinking behind this diplomatic initiative may have been the establishment of a new tetrarchy, with himself and Licinius as *augusti* and Bassianus and Constantine's son Crispus as *caesares*. This would have removed Licinius' son from the power equation, and with his father's consent at that. The proposal seems to have included the requirement that Crispus would serve under Licinius in the East, while Bassianus would take over Italy.⁶ This, again, is an elegant hypothesis that explains both the phrase "following the precedent of Diocletian and Maximian" and why Constantine had not yet made Crispus *caesar* (it would have been politically tactless towards Licinius). In reality, by proposing a tetrarchy, Constantine was merely setting a trap for Licinius. The name aside, the proposition had nothing to do with the original idea of a tetrarchy; it was just a temporary measure born of emergency.

Whatever was going on here, Licinius refused the offer,⁷ evidently considering his young son his successor. Constantine's diplomatic moves can thus be viewed as one last peaceful effort to secure his line's future rule over the whole empire. If war was the only remaining way to achieve this, so be it. All he needed now was to come up with a pretext, and one was soon in the offing. The *Origo* relates that Bassianus' brother Senecio, an official in Licinius' court, is said to have encouraged Bassianus to plot against Constantine; this plot was discovered and Bassianus was executed by Constantine in 316.⁸ Potter recalls that, in this same year in which the accusation was being levelled at Bassianus, Fausta finally bore Constantine a son, the future Constantine II (on 7 August).⁹ All of a sudden, then, Bassianus was not only redundant now that Constantine's diplomatic efforts had failed, but also, and worse, he posed a political danger to Constantine's sons in the future. He could still prove useful, though, if a false accusation were made against him. After Bassianus' execution, Constantine asked Licinius to hand him Senecio, knowing full well that Licinius would refuse (the *Origo* tells us that Senecio was a man loyal

⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 101–103.

⁷ Southern (2004, 176) concludes that Bassianus was indeed appointed *caesar* ("he appointed his brother-in-law Bassianus as his Caesar"). Others disagree, e.g. *PLRE I*, 150.

⁸ Kienast (1996, 307) naturally dates this event to 314, since he also places the first war with Licinius in that year (see below).

⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 377. On the birthdate controversy, see below.

to Licinius). In fact, not only did Licinius refuse, but also in Emona (present-day Ljubljana, Slovenia) he ordered that Constantine's statues be torn down (*apud Emonam Constantini imagines statuasque deiecerat*). The war that then erupted suited both sides.

Constantine was the aggressor, penetrating deep into the Balkans with his army. On 8 October 316, the Battle of Cibalae (present-day Vinkovci, Croatia) was fought near Sirmium, in which Constantine emerged victorious and Licinius was forced to retreat eastwards into Thrace,¹⁰ where he named an officer named Valens emperor, elevating him straight to the rank of *augustus*.¹¹ At Adrianople, there was another battle, probably in January 317,¹² in which Constantine was again triumphant. Assuming that Licinius would retreat to Asia, he proceeded towards Byzantium, but he was mistaken. Licinius merely withdrew north-west to Beroe (present-day Stara Zagora, Bulgaria) in order to cut off Constantine's army, forcing him to the negotiating table. Constantine, as the civil war's convincing but not complete victor, had the whole of the Balkans except the Thracian diocese added to his empire. Valens, needless to say, was stripped of his imperial rank and later put to death. And in Serdica on 1 March 317, three new *caesares* were proclaimed: Crispus, his fresh-born half-brother Constantine II, and Licinius' son Licinius, then about 20 months old. To confirm the newly made peace between the two sides, Crispus (for the first time) and Licinius (for the fifth time) were appointed consuls for the year 318.

In the previous chapter, we briefly discussed the chronological problem we have with Fausta's age at the time of her marriage to Constantine,

¹⁰ In the past, the first war between Constantine and Licinius was thought to have taken place in 314. This is probably because Otto Seeck (1984, 163) dated the Battle of Cibalae to 8 October 314 after consulting *Cons. Const. s. a. 314 (Volusiano II et Anniano—his consulibus bellum cibalense fuit die VIII id. Oct.)*; cf. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 235. As recently as 2007, Noel Lenski (2007a, 3) noted that the issue had yet to be resolved, but that he himself (Lenski 2007b, 73–74) was leaning towards 316, as were virtually all modern publications on Constantine (Cameron 2008, 90; Češka 2000, 56; Corcoran 2000, 7; Barnes 2014, 103; Pohlsander 2004, 41; Potter 2004, 378; Odahl 2013, 164). Claus (1996, 44), though a little more hesitant, also inclines to 316. This more or less relegates the year 314 to older publications (e.g. Jones 1972, 127; Kienast 1996, 299; König 1987, 123) and positively ancient tomes (Burckhardt 1949, 278).

¹¹ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 296. Literary sources refer to him as *caesar*, but coins as *augustus*.

¹² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* 1982, 73 and 82.

and thus the year of her birth. We concluded that Fausta was probably born around 290 (making her approximately 17 years old at the time of her marriage).¹³ However, the drawback of this hypothesis is that we cannot explain why Fausta did not give birth to her first child until 316, when she would have been about 26 years old. Were there any medical reasons for this (about which our sources are understandably silent)? The person best placed to tell us would have been Fausta herself, and it would be interesting to know what she thought of the man who was responsible for the death of her father in 310 and her brother two years later. As rightly pointed out by Josef Češka, that is not the only difficult chronological problem we face.¹⁴ According to Zosimus and the *Epitome*, Constantine II was born in Arles just a few days before the ceremony appointing the new *caesares*¹⁵ was held, and his brother Constantius II was born, by all accounts, on 7 August 317 (see below). How could the same woman give birth to one son in February and another in August of the same year (i.e. 317)? Either our sources are wrong, or Fausta was not the mother of Constantine II. Few authors have had the courage to make this extreme claim.¹⁶ Our sources do not drop the slightest hint that Constantine II, like Crispus, was an illegitimate son (and if he was, we would be left grasping to identify the woman who gave birth to him).¹⁷ One solution would be to “postpone” Constantius’ birth until 318. So when was Constantius II actually born? The sources only tell us when Constantius died and how old he was, leaving us to calculate the year of his birth ourselves. Eutropius and Socrates Scholasticus agree that Constantius II died at the age of 45 in the thirty-eighth year

¹³ Barnes, *Constantine*, 56; Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 305. Stephenson (2010, 120) states, without further explanation, that Fausta was 14 or 15 years old at the time of her marriage (and thus assumes that she was born sometime in 292 or 293).

¹⁴ Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 92.

¹⁵ Zos. II, 20; *Epitome* 41, 4 (*item Constantinum iisdem diebus natum oppido Arelatensi Licinianumque, Licinii filium, mensium fere viginti, Caesares effecit*).

¹⁶ According to *PLRE I* (223, Fl. Claudius Constantinus 3), Constantine II was “probably illegitimate since his brother Constantius II was born to Fausta on 317 Aug. 7”.

¹⁷ On the whole, our sources are clearly influenced by the fact that Constantine II suffered *damnatio memoriae* in 340 (see Chapter 11).

of his reign.¹⁸ This would mean that he was born in 317.¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus cites the same number of years for the emperor's reign, but differs slightly in how many years he had lived, recording that he died at the age of "44 years and a few months".²⁰ This still allows us to date the emperor's birth to 317. Josef Češka believed another source needed to be enlisted: the anonymous *Epitome*, which claims that the emperor died in the forty-fourth year of his life, i.e. probably when he was 43 (*interiit anno aevi quarto et quadragesimo*), and in the thirty-ninth year of his reign (*imperii nono atque tricesimo*).²¹ Counting back, we would arrive at the year 318, but the *Epitome* also states that Constantius II was *caesar* for 15 years (*verum Augustus quarto vicesimoque: octo solus, cum fratribus atque Magnentio sedecim, quindecim Caesar*). This would hold up if Constantius had become *caesar* in 322 or 323, but we know that he did not acquire this title until 8 November 324.²² Just as the duration of his reign can be called into question, so can the length of his life. All told, Constantius II is unlikely to have been born in 318.²³

The one remaining way in which Fausta could have been the mother of both these sons of Constantine is if we leave Constantius' birth in 317, but push Constantine II's birth back to August 316. This is exactly what Timothy Barnes did,²⁴ paving the way for other Constantinian scholars to do the same.²⁵ David Potter went so far as to compile the sequence in which Constantine and Fausta had all their offspring: Constantine II was born on 7 August 316, Constantius II exactly a year later (7 August 317), followed by Constantina about a year after that, then Helena, and

¹⁸ Eutr. X, 15, 2 (*obiit inter Ciliciam Cappadociamque anno imperii octavo et tricesimo, aetatis quinto et quadragesimo*); Socr. HE II, 47.

¹⁹ Cf. PLRE I, 226, Fl. Iul. Constantius 8.

²⁰ Amm. Marc. XXI, 15, 3 (*imperii tricesimo octavo vitaeque anno quadragesimo quarto et mensibus paucis*). Ammianus erroneously records 5 October as the date of death; other sources agree on 3 November.

²¹ *Epitome* 42, 17.

²² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 85.

²³ Even so, König (1987, 139) does date the birth of Constantius II to 318 and the birth of Constantine II to 317.

²⁴ See Barnes (1981, 67; 1982, 43); and especially Barnes (2014, 102), footnote 19, where he puts forward his arguments.

²⁵ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 41; Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 163; Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 310.

finally Constans—the latter perhaps in 323 (see below).²⁶ This is a largely artificial line-up that is only tenuously supported by the sources, but no one has come up with a better one. It also has one considerable advantage: if Constantine II was indeed born in 316, then the events described above make perfect sense.

In determining the year of birth of the youngest child, Constans, we are presented with two pieces of information: Eutropius states that Constans died at the age of 30 (and was therefore born in 320), while the *Epitome* asserts that he died at the age of 27 (which would make the year of birth 323).²⁷ In this case, we should really give the benefit of the doubt to the *Epitome*, because otherwise Fausta would have given birth to each of her five offspring a year apart, which, while possible, is very unlikely.²⁸

Of all Constantine's issue, Crispus was the oldest, and he appears most on contemporary coins. How old can he have been in 317? Zosimus says that Crispus was a youth (*νεανίας*) at this time.²⁹ On the other hand, the rhetorician Nazarius delivered a speech in Rome on 1 March 321 to mark the anniversary of the appointment of Crispus and Constantine II as *caesares*, in which he notes that Crispus was still in his boyhood (*pueriles annos*) in 317.³⁰ As the scantness of such details prevent his date of birth from being determined with any exactitude, different scholars have alighted on various years in the early fourth century.³¹ What we do know is that Crispus married a certain Helena around 321 and that a child

²⁶ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 169.

²⁷ Eutr. X, 9, 3: *anno imperii septimo decimo, aetatis tricesimo*; cf. *Epitome* 41, 23: *anno tertio decimo Augustae dominationis (nam Caesar triennio fuerat), aevi septimo vicesimoque*.

²⁸ The year 323 is also preferred by Barnes (1982, 45).

²⁹ Zos. II, 20, 2.

³⁰ *Pan. Lat.* IV (10), 36, 3.

³¹ Pohlsander (1984, 81–82) concludes that the year was 305; Potter (2013, 98) suggests 303; Kienast (1996, 305) and Odahl (2013, 72) say around 300. Barnes (1982, 44) argues that, if Constantine himself was born in 272 or 273, Crispus could just as well have been born around 295 (cf. Barnes 2014, 48: “no later than c. 300”). This hypothesis, while not lacking in logic, is itself built on another hypothesis; its main weakness is that it is consistent with the claims of Zosimus, but not Nazarius. If Crispus was present when Nazarius gave his speech, and if he was indeed about 25 years old at this time, as Barnes asserts, it is sure to have been very awkward to hear the orator speak of him as a mere boy four years before.

was born to them in October 322. There is no reason why he could not already have fathered a child at the age of 17, and this is consistent with the news that his father appointed Lactantius as his tutor, probably around 315. This tutoring may have been provided in Trier, where Constantine himself was wont to stay at this time (specifically between May 313 and early 316).³² What is more, Crispus proved very useful in the second war against Licinius (in 324), which again leads us to ponder whether his year of birth was very close to 300. Crispus was therefore probably born around 300, when his father Constantine was forcibly stationed in the East and serving under Diocletian and Galerius.

THE SECOND WAR WITH LICINIUS

Although the outcome of the first war substantially reduced Licinius' territory and influence, it did not, as far as Constantine was concerned, provide a long-term solution to the situation. Constantine may now have wielded control over the majority of the empire (eight dioceses, compared to his brother-in-law's four), and the number of *caesares* may have reflected this balance of power between the emperors, but the purpose of the first war had been to destroy Licinius, not to negotiate with him, and the mere existence of the two Licinii posed a potential threat to the future of Constantine's dynasty.

Once peace had been restored, Constantine became lord and master of most of the Balkan Peninsula. He switched his main residence from Trier to Serdica, and any relocation by his court in the years that followed was usually limited to the Balkans (Sirmium, Viminacium, Naissus, and Thessalonica). Trier, on the other hand, became the seat of his *caesar* Crispus. Here, he made war with the Germanic tribes on the Rhine and, with the help of his praetorian prefect, administered Gaul, Britain, and probably Hispania.

We have seen that Licinius and the *caesar* Crispus were consuls in 318; the next year, they were succeeded by Constantine and the *caesar* Licinius. In 320, Constantine upset this balance for some reason by holding the consulship with his son Constantine II. Licinius responded to this disgraceful caprice by deciding to hold the consulship himself with his son in 321. Constantine ignored this, instead appointing his sons Crispus

³² Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 65–66.

and Constantine II as consuls for that year. Licinius chose not to recognise these appointments. Likewise, he ignored the next two pairs of consuls appointed by Constantine for 322 and 323 (these were prominent senators).³³ In 324, the consuls were again Constantine's sons Crispus and Constantine II. By then, this was a matter of little consequence as, from the spring of that year, and perhaps earlier, both sides had been busily preparing for war.

Frankly, the reasons why the two emperors fell out with each other in 320 are unexplained; nor do we know why, in the circumstances, the second war did not break out until 324.³⁴ All we can do is observe the various acts of hostility between them. Generally speaking, we can venture that, as in the case of the first war, a pretext was found (see below), that, as in 316, the war suited both sides (at least there is no sign that either side tried to avoid conflict), and that Constantine was again the aggressor.³⁵

The religious reasons for the second war, highlighted by certain sources and discussed by some modern historians, should not be exaggerated. Certainly, whereas Constantine, in the West, favoured the church and granted various privileges to bishops, Licinius never became a Christian; his coinage is firmly rooted in the tetrarchic tradition³⁶ and, according to Eusebius, he believed in the gods until the end of his life.³⁷ He may have suspected that his Christian subjects sympathised with Constantine, as Eusebius intimates, but he never resorted to persecuting them. At most, we could say he made their lives miserable by inflicting various injustices on them: he dismissed Christians from the service of the court, demoted Christian officers in the army, and required all soldiers to make sacrifices to the gods. Licinius generally banished Christians from churches, instead forcing them to worship, divided by sex, in the open

³³ Starting in 322, the East had acted as though there were no consuls, and in its official dating referred to the consulship of the two Licinii in 321 (Barnes 2014, 104–105).

³⁴ Potter (2004, 378), for example, is reluctant to give a reason for the war other than citing a jurisdictional dispute over borders (on this and other possible reasons, see below). Around 320, Constantine and Licinius stopped depicting each other on their coins (Odahl 2013, 172).

³⁵ Constantine is identified as the aggressor by Cameron (2008, 93) and Barnes (2014, 103). The *Origo* (5, 23) says that both sides sanctioned the breaking of the peace (*rupta iam pace utriusque consensu*).

³⁶ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 171–172.

³⁷ Euseb. *VC* II, 5.

fields outside cities—in the more wholesome fresh air, as he is reported to have put it (in contrast to Constantine, who had many churches built at this same time). He also forbade bishops from travelling, thus preventing them from holding synods and participating in the election of new bishops.³⁸ Proving that he had Christians put to death, however, is rather more difficult.³⁹ Juxtaposed with that ill treatment is the fact that Licinius’ wife Constantia was a Christian, and Eusebius of Nicomedia (who would later baptise Constantine) was a bishop active at Licinius’ court in Nicomedia.⁴⁰

According to Eusebius, Constantine considered it “pious and holy” to remove Licinius for the good of all mankind.⁴¹ Constantine’s proclaimed position was that he was going to the aid of the Christians in the East as their liberator from oppression. That Constantine was happy to use Licinius’ religious policy as a pretext for war is beyond doubt, but it is difficult to view the campaign as some sort of crusade.⁴² Constantine was a Christian; most of his soldiers were not. When, in 320, Constantine’s veterans complained that they (unlike Licinius’ veterans) were not exempt from taxes, Constantine legislated a remedy. When the emperor went to

³⁸ Euseb. *VC* I, 51–54. For a new bishop to be elected, at least three other bishops had to be present (Cameron and Hall 1999, 228). As far as Drake (2000, 236–237) is concerned, this regulation was mainly an attempt by Licinius to prevent doctrinal disputes within Christianity. He argues that, on the whole, Licinius’ religious policy had stagnated at the level of 313. This meant that Christians in the East found themselves in a less privileged position than those in Constantine’s dynamically developing West, and this contrast may have reinforced the impression that “persecution” was being perpetrated in the East.

³⁹ Barnes (2014, 105) characterises Licinius’ actions as “some repressive policies”; elsewhere (1981, 71), he notes that almost all documents purporting to describe the execution of Christians under Licinius are fictional. Potter (2013, 210) also casts doubt on the execution of Christians. However, Pohlsander (2004, 44) notes that “there appear to have been some cases of arrest and execution, too” and Odahl (2013, 174) says that “a number of Christians seem to have been martyred”. Nor does Lenski (2007b, 75) rule out executions.

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 70.

⁴¹ Euseb. *VC* II, 3; *cf.* *HE* X, 8–9. Other ecclesiastical writers agree that Licinius brought the war upon himself by persecuting Christians (Socr. *HE* I, 3–4; Sozom. *HE* I, 7).

⁴² Odahl (2013, 162–201) does actually describe Constantine’s second campaign against Licinius as a “crusade”.

meet them—for this was a matter he consulted with them personally—the assembled prefects, tribunes, and most distinguished soldiers greeted him with the words “Emperor Constantine, may the gods preserve you for us!”⁴³ as he entered the room. Constantine’s army can hardly be described as Christian. And, as Barnes points out, Constantine would have been hard put to accuse Licinius of persecuting Christians when he was doing the same in his own territory. As we already know, Constantine had been persecuting Donatists in his part of the empire since 317; in order to present the forthcoming war against Licinius, if nothing else, as a just cause, he had to abandon (at least temporarily) their persecution. The persecution of the Donatists did indeed cease at the end of 320, precisely when relations between the two emperors ruptured.⁴⁴

Pagan historians (Zosimus, Eutropius, and Aurelius Victor) offer no justification—save Constantine’s desire to conquer the world—for the second war. All they can do is put forward an immediate impetus for war, and even then they are rather vague about it. Zosimus relates that, sometime before the second war between Constantine and Licinius broke out, the Sarmatian king Rausimod and many of his warriors marched all the way from the Sea of Azov, crossed the Danube, and proceeded to wreak havoc on Roman territory until Constantine mustered an army to defeat them. The Sarmatians were chased back across the Danube, where those who were not slaughtered alongside their king were taken captive.⁴⁵ Certain quarters of the scholarly community have pondered whether the king, if not the warriors themselves, was a Goth.⁴⁶ Their reasoning is that the king’s name is probably Gothic⁴⁷ and that the *Origo* mentions that the Goths mounted an invasion on the Danube at the same

⁴³ *CTh* VII, 20, 2 (*Auguste Constantine, dii te nobis servent*). See Potter (2013, 209–210).

⁴⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 105.

⁴⁵ Zos. II, 21, 1–3.

⁴⁶ Treadgold (1997, 36) and Pohlsander (2004, 44) sit on the fence, while Wolfram (1990, 60) is certain that he was a Goth, and *PLRE I* (762) lists Rausimod unambiguously as a Sarmatian chieftain.

⁴⁷ Both parts of Rausimod’s name, i.e. *raus* and (probably) *mōPs*, are Gothic (see Orel 2003, 273 and 299), but the names of Sarmatian chieftains that have been handed down to us are not Germanic (see Amm. Marc. XVII, 12, 9: Zizais; XVII, 12, 11–12: Rumo, Zinafrus/Zinafer, Fragiledus, Usafer). There is always the possibility that Rausimod was a Sarmatian with a Gothic name, as Jordanes (*Get.* 58) explicitly says that it was common for Sarmatians to have Germanic names.

time. In that case, too, Constantine had set upon the aggressors, driving them across the Danube and forcing them to return the prisoners they had taken in Roman territory. However, we are not told the chieftain's name, and the time of the invasion is given as "when Constantine was in Thessalonica", which would place this Gothic incursion in the spring of either 323 or 324.⁴⁸ Yet the *Origo* suggests that some time elapsed between the Goths' invasion and the start of the civil war, during which Licinius complained that Constantine had encroached on his territory when battling the Goths; the *Origo* even specifies Moesia (undoubtedly *Moesia Inferior*) and Thrace as provinces ravaged by the Goths. This would mean that the Goths had penetrated deep into the diocese of Thrace (which was part of Licinius' dominion),⁴⁹ making it much more likely that the Goths invaded in 323. Zosimus says that, after the war with Rausimod, Constantine went to Thessalonica, where he prepared for war with Licinius. This would also point to the year 323. One final piece of evidence in support of this year is a law issued by Constantine on 28 April 323 forbidding, on pain of death by burning, collaboration with barbarians in the plundering of Roman territory.⁵⁰

We are left to ask ourselves whether two different invasions were launched in a single year, or whether there was a single invasion, but the details are muddled because we have accounts from two different historical traditions.⁵¹ The former would appear to be more correct when we consider the yawning differences between Zosimus' account and the version of events related by the *Origo*.⁵² For example, if Rausimod's men

⁴⁸ At both these times, Constantine is attested in Thessalonica (Barnes 1982, 75).

⁴⁹ *Origo* 5, 21 (*Item cum Constantinus Thessalonica esset, Gothi per neglectos limites eruperunt et vastata Thracia et Moesia praedas agere coeperunt. Tunc Constantini terrore impetu represso captivos illi inpetrata pace reddiderunt. sed hoc Licinius contra fidem factum questus est, quod partes suae ab alio fuerint vindicatae. Deinde cum variasset inter supplicancia et superba mandata, iram Constantini merito excitavit. per tempora, quibus nondum gerebatur bellum civile, sed item parabatur, Licinius scelere avaritia crudelitate libidine saeviebat, occisis ob divitias pluribus, uxoribus eorum corruptis.*)

⁵⁰ *CTh* VII, 1, 1; see Pharr et al. (1952, 155).

⁵¹ Those scholars contemplating that there was a single invasion place it in 323 (Barnes 1982, 75) or even 322 (Wilkes 2008, 232). Others discern two invasions, but suggest they took place in different years: the Sarmatians in 322, the Goths in 323 (Jones 1972, 128; Kienast 1996, 299).

⁵² Some (e.g. Kulikowski 2007, 359; 2007b, 81), in their efforts to reconstruct these events, also rely on the several references that are made to Constantine's battles with the

had come from the Sea of Azov (from the Crimea?), they could probably have got as far as the Balkans by sea, sailed up the Danube estuary, and ravaged the province of *Scythia*. Yet the *Origo* tells us that they struck not from the north-east, but more from the north, where present-day Romania lies. The most likely sequence of events is that news of the Gothic invasion reached Constantine in the spring of 323, prompting him to march his army out of Thessalonica, where he was evidently already laying the groundwork for war with Licinius. In all probability, Licinius was also preparing for battle, as he had previously withdrawn garrisons from Lower Moesia and, in doing so, had enabled the Goths to pass into his territory. The fact that the Goths were not expecting a fight from Licinius meant they were perhaps caught completely off-guard when Constantine charged against them, as to do so he must have encroached on Licinius' territory. At this point in time, Constantine's action elicited nothing more than a complaint from Licinius.⁵³ Later that year, in the spring or summer, Constantine then repulsed Rausimod's invasion, and on this occasion penetrated even deeper into Licinius' territory, making his way as far as the delta of the Danube and then into barbarian territory across the river. That was what incited Licinius to declare war. Constantine's motive for reaching so deeply into Licinius' territory was not only to provoke his brother-in-law into taking up arms, but also to show Licinius, the barbarians across the Danube, and his own people that he was now responsible for defending the entire Danube frontier. His incursion into barbarian territory also signalled his readiness to pursue a much more active policy on the Danube than had hitherto been customary.⁵⁴

Now there was nothing for it but to destroy Licinius for good. In preparation for the showdown, Constantine had a large harbour built at Thessalonica. He put his son Crispus in charge of naval operations, while

Sarmatians in the poems of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius. Yet Optatianus really offers no more than a summary of Constantine's feats against the Sarmatians in these years, without going into detail or telling us when these battles were waged. See Optat. *Carm.* 6, 15–26 (*Sarmaticas [...] strages [...] Campona cruore [...] madens; Margensis memorare boni caelestia facta; testis magnorum vicina Bononia praesens*); 7, 32 (*Victor Sarmatiae totiens!*).

⁵³ It may have been at this time that Licinius availed himself of the services of a Gothic leader named Alica, who then fought with his men on Licinius' side at the Battle of Chrysopolis (see *Origo* 5, 27).

⁵⁴ For details on this episode, see Doležal (2018). For various other interpretations, see Lenski (2007b, 75), Barnes (2014, 106; 1981, 76), and Odahl (2013, 174–175).

he and his army left Thessalonica for Thrace in the summer of 324.⁵⁵ On 3 July Licinius was defeated in the fierce Battle of Adrianople, fled the battlefield, and took refuge in Byzantium; his army, or what was left of it, surrendered to Constantine the next day. Constantine moved to besiege Byzantium. Then Crispus won an impressive naval victory over Licinius' admiral Abantus,⁵⁶ sailed with his fleet into the Hellespont, and forced Licinius to withdraw from Byzantium across the Bosphorus to Chalcedon. Here, Licinius appointed Martinianus, one of his courtiers, co-ruler.⁵⁷ In the meantime, Constantine had reached and started to besiege Byzantium. Straight after meeting Crispus and hearing from him how he had triumphed at sea, he took his army to Asia and again fought Licinius on land. At Chrysopolis (present-day Üsküdar on the Asian side of Istanbul, Turkey), near Chalcedon, Licinius was again defeated on 18 September. Byzantium and Chalcedon opened their gates to Constantine. Licinius fled to Nicomedia, so Constantine set off in hot pursuit and again, on reaching the city, surrounded it.⁵⁸ Licinius, obviously realising that all was lost, had his wife Constantia and the local bishop Eusebius plead with Constantine for his life.⁵⁹ By all accounts, Constantine agreed immediately, because on 19 September, just one day after his defeat, Licinius walked out of the gates of Nicomedia, presented himself to Constantine, laid down the badges of imperial power, and begged forgiveness.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Zos. II, 22–28; *Origo* 23–28. See Appendix C for troop numbers.

⁵⁶ Abantus is the name given by Zosimus (II, 23); the *Origo* (5, 23) calls him Amandus.

⁵⁷ Martinianus was *magister officiorum*. According to Kienast (1996, 296) and König (1987, 156), Martinianus (like Valens) is referred to as *caesar* by literary sources, but as *augustus* on his coins.

⁵⁸ The encirclement of Nicomedia is referred to specifically by Praxagoras (see Barnes 2014, 196) and Zosimus (II, 28).

⁵⁹ This is how Barnes (2014, 106) and Lenski (2007b, 76) reconstruct the event. Odahl (2013, 181) imagines that Licinius was persuaded to surrender by Constantia. Pohlsander (2004, 45) believes that Constantia alone took the initiative, interceding with her brother on behalf of both Licinii. The sources agree that Constantia was a mediator in the negotiations (Zos. II, 28; *Origo* 5, 28; *Epitome* 41, 7).

⁶⁰ König (1987, 164) considers it unlikely that Constantine covered the 67 Roman miles or so between Chrysopolis and Nicomedia in a single day. Burgess (2008, 50) submits that Constantine's army routinely marched at speeds of up to 30 miles per day, and that there are exceptional instances where messengers on horseback travelled 100–160 miles per day. As it was essential not to allow Licinius a moment's respite, Constantine evidently left his foot soldiers at Chrysopolis and set off after Licinius with his cavalry.

Constantine, magnanimous in victory, spared the lives of both Licinius and Martinianus, though it looks like Martinianus' fate was already sealed: according to Zosimus, he was put to death immediately, while the *Origo* says he was dispatched to Cappadocia and executed there.⁶¹ Licinius is said to have attended the banquet held by Constantine in Nicomedia before being sent to Thessalonica, where he was allowed to live as a private person, but under house arrest and no doubt heavily guarded.

König rightly points out that Constantine did not pardon Licinius because he was moved by Constantia's show of marital fidelity or because he was setting an example of Christian morality and forgiveness; in reality, this was a classic display of a Roman emperor's clemency (*clementia principis*).⁶² Such nobleness, however, was probably staged for maximum effect: with everyone relieved that the war was over, Constantine's magnanimity is sure to have made quite an impression all round. The fact of the matter was that Licinius was now safely cut off from the outside world in Thessalonica. Even so, he would have to be killed. When Constantine ordered his execution there the following spring, he was hard put to think of a reason; the best he could come up with was that Licinius had attempted a coup.⁶³ Hence the *damnatio memoriae*. Even sources favourable to Constantine agree that Constantine violated the sanctity of his oath guaranteeing Licinius' safety.⁶⁴ The *Origo*, usually such a rich and valuable source, has been heavily edited right where Licinius' internment and death are described. This subsequent editor (see Chapter 2 on this issue) clumsily added passages from Orosius,⁶⁵ resulting in a rather

⁶¹ *Origo* 5, 29; Zos. II, 28. In the texts of Aurelius Victor (41, 9) and the *Epitome* (41, 7), the event has been condensed and gives the impression that he perished at the same time as Licinius.

⁶² König, *Origo Constantini*, 164.

⁶³ If Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* I, 4) is to be believed, Licinius, once he was in Thessalonica, subsequently "mustered barbarians of sorts in an attempt to atone for his defeat by renewing the war". How he could have done this when he was under house arrest is not at all clear, but this officially condoned fabrication is repeated by Zonaras (XIII, 1, 6).

⁶⁴ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 323 (*contra ius sacramenti*); Eutr. X, 6 (*contra religionem sacramenti*). Zosimus (II, 28) says, in this respect, that Constantine was wont to violate his oaths; he also adds that Licinius was strangled. Eusebius (*HE* X, 9, 5; *VC* II, 18), on the other hand, confines himself to the observation that Licinius received a just punishment; he gives no details.

⁶⁵ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 28, 20–21.

unwieldy text from which we can only make out that Licinius' death was demanded by the soldiers (stationed in Thessalonica?).⁶⁶ Thus we are left in the dark as to what the original text had to say about how or why Licinius was executed.⁶⁷

Licinius' young son, the *caesar* Licinius, was also put to death, probably in 326, despite the fact that Constantine had initially granted him a pardon and even though he was his sister's son and was barely 11 years old.⁶⁸ Like his father, he suffered *damnatio memoriae*. The official propaganda never even attempted to find any justification for this execution.⁶⁹ Was it really necessary to execute an 11-year-old boy? The next chapter will try to answer this question, but even the Christian author Orosius would subsequently ask himself "why the emperor Constantine turned the avenging sword and the punishment intended for the impious against his own relatives".⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Origo* 5, 29. Only a few fragments of the original passages remain, marked here in bold: *Licinius Thessalonicam missus est; sed Herculi Maximi socii sui motus exemplo, ne iterum depositam purpuram in perniciem reipublicae sumeret, tumultu militaribus exigentibus in Thessalonica* [the subject, i.e. *Constantinus*, and the object, i.e. *Licinium* or *eum*, are missing here] *iussit occidi, Martinianum in Cappadocia*. König (1987, 165–166) offers a more detailed analysis.

⁶⁷ Jordanes (*Get.* 111) adds one fanciful detail when he notes that Licinius, while imprisoned as a private citizen in Thessalonica, was killed by the Goths on Constantine's orders (*eumque devictum et in Thessalonica clausum privatum ab imperio Constantini victoris gladio trucidarunt*). Indeed, Jordanes tends to make out that the Goths were allies of Constantine, which seems very strange when we consider that Constantine was at war with the Goths in 323 (see above) and 332 (see Chapter 11). Not to mention Jordanes' claim that the Goths helped Constantine in his fight against Licinius, which stands in stark contrast to the *Origo* (5, 27) and its assertion that the Gothic leader Alica and his people fought alongside Licinius at the Battle of Chrysopolis.

⁶⁸ Barnes (1981, 214) concludes that the two Licinii were executed together in the spring of 325; Lenski (2007b, 77) and *PLRE I* (510) date the death of the elder Licinius to 325 and the younger to 326; according to Pohlsander (2004, 45), both years are plausible for the death of the boy. Indeed, the sources report the death of the younger Licinius together with the death of Constantine's son Crispus, which would point to 326: *Crispus filius Constantini, et Licinius iunior Constantinae Constantini sororis et Licinii filius, crudelissime interficiuntur* (Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 325); *filium et sororis filium, commodae indolis iuvenem, interfecit* (Eutr. X, 6). See also the following chapter.

⁶⁹ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 296. This is summed up succinctly by Pohlsander (2004, 45): "One wonders how Constantine justified the killing of an innocent child, his own nephew, and how Constantia could have failed to rebuke him bitterly".

⁷⁰ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 28, 26 (*sed inter haec latent causae, cur vindicem gladium et destinatum in impios punitionem Constantinus imperator etiam in proprios egit affectus*).

Licinius had one more son. He was probably born of a slave girl and, though we do not know his name, two laws from 336 refer to him. The fact that he was not so important saved him from execution; instead, it was enough to condemn him to slave labour in the imperial textile factory in Carthage.⁷¹

Now that Licinius had been defeated, Constantine was the absolute ruler of the entire Roman world. His position was now unassailable. He had emerged victorious in all the wars with the barbarians and in all the civil wars of the crumbling tetrarchy. The past resolved, he now had to turn his attention to the future. On 8 November 324, Constantine appointed his then seven-year-old son, Constantius II, *caesar*. The empire now had one *augustus* and three *caesares*. From Constantine's perspective in late 324, the future of the empire and his dynasty must have looked very rosy indeed.

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⁷¹ *CTh* IV, 6, 2; IV, 6, 3. See Pohlsander (2004, 46).

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Crispus

INVESTIGATION

In 326, on Constantine's orders, his eldest son Crispus was unexpectedly executed for reasons entirely unknown to us. In the same year, Constantine's wife (Crispus' stepmother) Fausta was probably also executed; in any case, she disappeared from public life for good. Both she and Crispus, suffering *damnatio memoriae*, ceased to be mentioned thereafter by our sources, so this is where the trail ends for us. We do not even know whether these two events were related in any way. What we can be sure of is that the year 326 is another "neuralgic point" in the history of Constantine's reign; this was such a pivotal event, it has become a matter of contention in modern scholarship and we might even conjecture that it offers a fundamental insight into our understanding of Constantine's personality. The disappearance of Crispus was a major event: not only was Crispus the eldest of Constantine's children, but he was also the obvious heir to the throne.¹ Moreover, he had helped his father in the

¹ The claim that his lowly origin disqualified him from succession is, of course, absurd, yet it has been raised, see, for example, Guthrie (1966, 327) ("obviously disqualified from promotion to the rank of Augustus by the circumstances of his birth"). Pohlsander (1984, 105) rightly emphasises that Crispus' title of *caesar* was a precursor to the title of *augustus* and that Constantine himself started his career in exactly the same situation, one of his own parents—his mother—being of a very low social status.

administration of the empire and distinguished himself in the second war with Licinius (see Chapter 8).

Before we begin our investigation, it is important to note that the cases of Crispus and Fausta were and remained official secrets of Constantine's government.² No public statement was issued, there was an obvious information embargo, and both Crispus and Fausta suffered *damnatio memoriae*, which in practice meant that their names were erased from all official records and inscriptions. In the chronological context of this book, these are the last two of the many instances of this act—particularly rife in the third century—that we have the opportunity to explore.³

Keeping to tradition, officials acted as if the individuals in question never existed at all, just as in George Orwell's novel *1984* (although Constantine lacked the technological means to make Crispus an “unperson”). One example of Crispus' *damnatio memoriae* is an inscription from southern Italy (ILS 708), which, besides Constantine's mother Helena, mentions her grandchildren Crispus, Constantine II, and Constantius II, all of them with the rank of *caesar*. This means that the inscription must have been made between 324, when Constantius became *caesar*, and 326, when Crispus was executed. Someone did try to expunge Crispus' name, but it has remained legible. On another inscription from the same period (ILS 710), Crispus' name was erased more thoroughly, but it can still be deduced from the context (again, he is named together with his two brothers). Fausta, too, is mentioned here; the attempt to erase her name was rather half-hearted as it can still be read. Surprisingly, there are even a number of inscriptions where Crispus' name was left entirely intact.⁴ Why were Constantine's people so shoddy in their work? Perhaps Crispus was more popular than Constantine realised. Alternatively, from 326 onwards, Crispus ceased to exist not only going forwards, but also backwards; if he had never existed at all, no official could be instructed to remove his

² Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 106.

³ Examples of *damnatio memoriae* at this time include Geta in 211, Macrinus and his young son in 218, Elagabalus in 222, and Maximinus Thrax and his son in 238. In some cases, this was only temporary, e.g. Severus Alexander suffered *damnatio memoriae* in 235 on the orders of Maximinus Thrax, but this was rescinded after the latter's death in 238 (Kienast 1996, 177–178). Neither Crispus nor Fausta was ever rehabilitated (Kienast 1996, 305–306).

⁴ ILS 712, 713, 714, and 716.

name from all records and inscriptions. Whatever the case, the information embargo ensured that all contemporary sources—even those built into Constantine’s “propaganda machine”—remained silent on the crown prince and his fate. Later sources have very little to say on the matter, and any information they do venture is sometimes conflicting. With no readily available explanation for what happened to Crispus and Fausta, some modern scholars merely resort to recapping all the known facts.⁵ And yet, far from being a complete mystery, I believe that we can actually throw some light on Crispus’ case.

In Chapter 8, we summed up the known facts about the life of Crispus up to the year 317. We know that Constantine saw to Crispus’ education and that, by agreement with Licinius, he promoted him to the rank of *caesar*. We also noted that, in the peace made after the first war between Constantine and Licinius, the latter became consul for 318, with Crispus as his colleague. Crispus held the consulate for a second time in 321 (although this was not recognised in the East) and then for a last time in 324 (together with his father). Crispus, deputising for Constantine, was sent to Gaul, where he defeated the Franks in 319 and the Alamanni in 323.⁶ In about 321, Crispus married a certain Helena, of whom we know nothing, and, shortly before 30 October 322, they had a child. We know this because, on that day, Constantine promulgated a law in Rome that granted a near-universal amnesty in memory of the event.⁷ There can be no doubting the sincerity of the ageing emperor’s joy at the birth of his first grandson (or granddaughter), and yet we know absolutely nothing about the fate of the child or its mother.

The zenith of Crispus’ career was his brilliant maritime leadership during the second war against Licinius in 324. When Eusebius finally finished all ten books of his *Ecclesiastical History* (sometime between 324 and 326), he included high praise of Crispus: at one point, Eusebius says that, in 324, Constantine waged war against Licinius “together with his son Crispus, a most philanthropic Emperor”; describing the end of this war, Eusebius adds that “the greatest victor, Constantine, with his son Crispus, the most god-loving Emperor, who was similar to his father in

⁵ E.g. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 380–382.

⁶ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 83.

⁷ *CTh* IX, 38, 1 (*propter criski atque helenae partum omnibus indulgemus practer veneficos homicidas adulteros*).

all things, brought the East into their possession”.⁸ In the final version of the *Ecclesiastical History*, however, preserved only in a Syriac translation, we can see that Eusebius removed these passages at some point after 326.⁹ In his *Life of Constantine*, not written until after 337, Eusebius is silent on Crispus.

Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, in his poetry, mentions Crispus several times and writes about him in the most laudatory terms. In the tenth poem, for example, the crown prince is briefly extolled as the conqueror of the Franks (25–26), and the ninth poem praises him at length. The poet advises Crispus always to show lenience with defeated barbarian tribes that came to him seeking peace (28–29); this was evidently an allusion to Crispus’ victory over the Franks or the Alamanni. The prince is described here as the pride and adornment of his father (26–27) and even as the world’s salvation (23) and hope (27).¹⁰ These poems were probably written between 319 and 326.

The *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, likely written shortly after Constantine’s death, states that Crispus was one of the new *caesares* in 317, and also mentions him in connection with the defeat of Licinius in 324.¹¹ It tells us nothing, however, about his subsequent fate. This absence is particularly conspicuous at the end, when all Constantine’s sons but Crispus are named. Even the *caesar* Dalmatius is mentioned here; Crispus simply vanishes at some point in the narration.

In his panegyric to Constantius II (written probably in 356), the future emperor Julian managed to refer to Crispus without actually naming him.¹² A few years later, Aurelius Victor briefly mentioned Crispus and Constantine II as the new *caesares* in 317, and he also summed up the events of 326 in this way: “When the eldest of these had died on the orders of his father, the reason is uncertain” (*quorum cum natura*

⁸ Euseb. *HE* X, 9, 4 and 9, 6.

⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 5.

¹⁰ Optat. *Carm.* 9, 23–24 (*sancte, salus mundi, armis insignibus ardens, Crispe, avis melior*) and 26–27 (*nobile tu decus es patri, tuque alme Quiritum et spes orbis eris*). Cf. Optat. *Carm.* 4, 5; 8, 33.

¹¹ *Origo* 5, 19; 5, 23; 5, 26–27.

¹² Julian. *Or.* I, 9 D. Julian briefly mentions three brothers of Constantius II, “one of whom helped his father in the fight against tyrants”.

grandior, incertum qua causa, patris iudicio occidisset).¹³ Chronologically speaking, Victor is the first source to mention Crispus' execution. Victor owed the beginning of his career to Constantius II and thus understandably avoided being critical of Constantine; Eutropius, on the other hand, wrote his *Breviarum* in 369 and felt no such compulsion. Although he never mentions Crispus by name, he openly blames Constantine for his death: "But Constantine, made somewhat arrogant by his success, changed from his former agreeably mild temperament. First he persecuted his relatives and killed his son, an outstanding man, and his sister's son, subsequently his wife and afterwards numerous friends".¹⁴ Although Eutropius clearly held Crispus in high esteem and considered his execution regrettable, the ban on information (if it still was in place) perhaps prevented him from stating the reasons for it, if he knew them at all.

In any case, the government's embargo on information must have expired by 380, because Jerome succinctly remarked in his *Chronicle* that Crispus and the *caesar* Licinius were "very cruelly killed".¹⁵ We do not know how Licinius the younger died, and we have only one (much later) source that explains the way Crispus died: he is said to have drunk poison, which is not a cruel means of execution.¹⁶ Just like Eutropius, Jerome seems to link the deaths of Crispus and Licinius. This is quite remarkable: was there any correlation between them?

Ammianus Marcellinus, chronologically the next source, tells us where Crispus was executed: Pola (present-day Pula, Croatia).¹⁷ Ammianus noted that Pola was also the place where the *caesar* Constantius Gallus, another member of the Constantinian dynasty, was executed in 354. Was Constantius II, who ordered this later execution, trying to imitate his father? And was Crispus, like Gallus, charged with treason?

¹³ Aur. Vict. 41, 6 and 10–11. Translation: Bird (1994, 50).

¹⁴ Eutr. X, 6 (*verum insolentia rerum secundarum aliquantum Constantinus ex illa favorabili animi docilitate mutavit. Primum necessitudines persecutus egregium virum filium et sororis filium, commodae indolis iuvenem, interfecit, mox uxorem, post numerosos amicos*). Translation: Bird (1993, 66).

¹⁵ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 325 (*Crispus filius Constantini, et Licinius junior Constantiae Constantini sororis et Licinii filius, crudelissime interficiuntur*). Writing shortly after 417, Paulus Orosius combined and shortened this account by Jerome and Eutropius (*Hist.* VII, 28, 26: *nam Crispum filium suum et Licinium sororis filium interfecit*).

¹⁶ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* V, 8, 2.

¹⁷ Amm. Marc. XIV, 11, 20 (*prope oppidum Polam, ubi quondam peremptum Constantini filium accepimus Crispum*).

The *Epitome de Caesaribus* is the first source to suggest that the deaths of Crispus and Fausta were connected. The anonymous author indicates that Fausta was responsible for Crispus' death because she was the one who prompted Constantine to have him executed. The author, with his cautious use of *ut putant* ("they say"), presents this story as a rumour, and perhaps a widespread one at that. The information embargo had clearly worked—by the end of the *fourth* century, people were resorting to conjecture as they tried to figure out what had happened in 326. The *Epitome* adds that Constantine's mother Helena, grieving her grandson's death, rebuked the emperor, who subsequently ordered Fausta's death by having her locked in overheated baths until she died. The *Epitome* thus implies that Crispus was innocent and that Fausta had devised some sort of scheme that backfired miserably on her.¹⁸

As for the church historians of the fifth century, Socrates Scholasticus and Theodoret make no mention of the death of Crispus, and Sozomen does so merely in an attempt to disprove (widespread?) allegations that Constantine converted to Christianity because of his guilt over the execution of Crispus.¹⁹ Philostorgius repeats the story told by the *Epitome*, with a significant twist: he asserts that Fausta persuaded her husband to have Crispus executed, then the emperor found out that Fausta had an affair with a servant and ordered that she be suffocated in a hot bath. Helena does not figure in this story. The sexual motive which appears here for the first time is perhaps nothing more than hearsay. Moreover, it supplies a reason only for the removal of Fausta, but not Crispus. Philostorgius adds that Constantine was afterwards poisoned by his brothers (presumably his stepbrothers Julius Constantius and Flavius Dalmatius) to avenge Crispus. This addition makes his narrative all the more untrustworthy.²⁰

In the early sixth century, Zosimus (who based his narrative on Eunapius) further exploits the sexual motive, dropping the bombshell

¹⁸ *Epitome* 41, 11–12 (*At Constantinus obtento totius Romani imperii mira bellorum felicitate regimine Fausta coniuge, ut putant, suggerente Crispum filium necari iubet. Dehinc uxorem suam Faustam in balneas ardentis coniectam interemit, cum eum mater Helena dolore nimio nepotis increparet*).

¹⁹ Soz. *HE* I, 5. Sozomenus was evidently responding to Eunapius (on whose work the narrative of Zosimus was based, see below). The emperor Julian alluded to it in his satirical treatise *Caesares* (336); even in the sixth century, Evagrius can be found reacting to this allegation (see below).

²⁰ Philost. *HE* II, 4. See Lenski (2007, 90).

of incest. According to him, Constantine “without any consideration for natural law, killed his son, Crispus, on suspicion of having had intercourse with his stepmother, Fausta. And when Constantine’s mother, Helena, was saddened by this atrocity and was inconsolable at the young man’s death, Constantine, as if to comfort her, applied a remedy worse than the disease: he ordered a bath to be overheated, and shut Fausta up in it until she was dead”.²¹ Zosimus then essentially repeats what Sozomen had protested against: that the emperor was greatly troubled by his conscience and thus converted to Christianity, and because he could not bear to stay in Rome, he founded Constantinople.²² Needless to say, both these assertions are nonsensical. Constantine became a Christian many years before Constantinople was established (which was almost two years before the death of Crispus, in late 324).²³ Zosimus (or rather Eunapius) thus disqualifies himself as an important witness in the deaths of Crispus and Fausta.

The next in line, Zonaras, differs from Zosimus in that he blames everything on Fausta: she tried to seduce Crispus and, when her efforts failed, accused him before Constantine of attempted rape. The emperor had Crispus executed, but when he discovered the truth (we are not told how), he ordered that Fausta be shut in a hot bath. Like Philostorgius, Zonaras leaves Helena out of this story.²⁴

Other sources add few details. As we have seen, Sidonius Apollinaris, writing at the end of the fifth century, speaks of Crispus dying by poison (and Fausta in an overheated bath).²⁵ At the end of the sixth century, Gregory of Tours tells us much the same, with the significant addition that Crispus and Fausta “wanted to be traitors to Constantine’s reign” (whatever this phrase means).²⁶ At the end of the sixth century, the Byzantine church historian Evagrius rejected Zosimus’ assertion that Constantine became a Christian only after the execution of Crispus (just

²¹ Zos. II, 29, 2. Translation: Ridley (1982, 36–37).

²² Zos. II, 29–30.

²³ Barnes, *Constantine*, 111–113.

²⁴ Zonaras XIII, 2, 12–13.

²⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* V, 8, 2 (*extinxerat coniugem Faustam calore balnei, filium Crispum frigore veneni*).

²⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* I, 36 (*hic Constantinus anno vicesimo imperii sui Crispum filium veneno, Faustam coniugem calente balneo interfecit, scilicet quod proditores regni eius esse voluissent*).

as Sozomen previously rejected that claim by Zosimus' source, Eunapius). Evagrius, however, went further in that he denied that Fausta and Crispus were ever executed by Constantine.²⁷ It seems clear that, by then, even the basic outlines of the story had been lost, and what had happened a quarter of a millennium previously had become anybody's guess.

ANALYSIS

A simple comparison of all available sources indicates that they can be broken down into several groups. The early sources (Optatianus, Eusebius, the *Origo*, and Julianus) do not even mention the execution, let alone its causes. The following group (Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Jerome, and Ammianus) mostly drew on the *Kaisergeschichte*, mentioning the execution, but not its causes (which were probably not described in the *KG*). The next group of sources tried to fashion a link between the deaths of Crispus and Fausta and can be broken down further into two subgroups—sources that speak of incest (the *Epitome* and Philostorgius) and those that do not (Zosimus and Zonaras). Other late sources, such as Sidonius Apollinaris or Gregory of Tours, are of no help.

The case of Crispus has astonished and confused scholars since at least Edward Gibbon.²⁸ There is no consensus on the date of Crispus' execution—various dates between March and June 326 have been advocated²⁹—or, for that matter, on the date of Fausta's death. We do not know how much time passed between these two events or even whether they were at all related.³⁰ Timothy Barnes offered a plausible reconstruction of where and when the whole affair took place. He argues that

²⁷ Evagrius, *HE* III, 40–41.

²⁸ Gibbon (1995, 585–586). Some modern scholars do not even try to find a motive; they either briefly retell the broad outlines of the affair (Drake 2000, 237) or simply list all previous hypotheses (Bardill 2012, 258).

²⁹ According to Seeck (1984, 176), the event occurred in the second half of March. Guthrie (1966, 326) believed it was “between May 15 and June 17”. Cf. Barnes (1982, 84) (“c. May”) and Drijvers, 46 (“probably in May”). Kienast (1996, 306) opted for March. Barnes later (2014, 147) concluded that the sentence was handed down and the execution was carried out between early April and early May.

³⁰ Clauss argued (1996, 50–51) that Fausta survived Crispus by only a few days, while Potter (2013, 245) concluded that Crispus was executed in the first half of 326, with Fausta vanishing from public life a few months after that, though “her actual death may have taken place a couple of years later”.

Crispus died between early April and early May, while Fausta's death did not follow until the second half of July or the first half of August. Constantine is attested by our sources in Aquileia at the beginning of April and in Milan in July. It is only about 180 km from Aquileia to Pola, where Crispus was confronted with the accusation and drank poison (the mildness of the execution suggests that he was allowed to choose how he would die). In the second half of July, Constantine was in Rome, where Helena blamed Fausta and where Fausta died.³¹ We can accept this sequence of events as a plausible reconstruction.

First, we will look at the sexual motive offered by sources that are hostile to Constantine or were not drawn up until much later (or both). We do not know the birth year of Crispus. Barnes claimed that he may well have been born *c.* 295,³² while others favour *c.* 305.³³ Crispus was, at any rate, in his twenties in 326. In the chapter on Licinius, we concluded that Fausta was born around 290, so she would have been about 36 at the time of Crispus' death. Constantine did not choose her for her beauty; in fact, he did not choose her at all. He married her in 307, when she was about 17, as part of a political deal with Maximian. By 326, she was the mother of five children aged 3–10 years. In 324 or 325, the title of *augusta* was bestowed on her.³⁴ It seemed absurd to Barnes that a married man about 26 years old, the father of a child, would start an affair with his stepmother.³⁵ I suspect that this notion would have been equally absurd to Constantine, if indeed Fausta told him that she had been seduced or raped by Crispus. There can be no real evidence of this, only allegations and false witnesses, either bribed or forced. It is unlikely that the Emperor would have believed such a story and that his reaction would have been so cruel and, more importantly, so hasty. Are

³¹ Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 220–221; *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 77; *Constantine*, 144–150.

³² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 44. Cf. Barnes (2014, 48) (“no later than *c.* 300”).

³³ Pohlsander (1984, 82) or Guthrie (1966, 325).

³⁴ Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 305. Her name was now Flavia Maxima Fausta Augusta.

³⁵ Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 220. Furthermore, Barnes notes that Crispus lived in Trier and Fausta stayed with her husband, so there was hardly any contact between them. Pohlsander (1984, 104) argues that Crispus did spend enough time in the East in 324 for an accusation of this kind to arise.

we to believe that Constantine, without actual evidence of guilt, would have immediately executed his principal heir, and that, on top of that, he would have deprived his other sons, who were still very young, of their mother?³⁶

Some scholars have tried to explain this affair as a power game by Fausta. Charles M. Odahl supposed that Fausta was harbouring fears that, should Constantine die prematurely, Crispus would assume supreme power, and in doing so push her own children aside. Odahl stressed that exactly the same situation had occurred 20 years earlier, in 306. Back then, Constantine's three brothers were still immature, and Constantine denied them the opportunity to participate in his reign either at the time or later. It is possible that Fausta was thinking along these lines; it is equally conceivable that there was no love lost between Fausta and her stepson. If this was the case, we can rule out a sexual motive. We are thus left with the possibility that Fausta's accusation was false. Unfortunately, there are still several difficult questions to answer. Why was Fausta playing such a dangerous game? Why did she lay her trap in 326 and not earlier? What role did Helena play in this? Odahl assumed that Helena somehow knew the truth, but how could she know that the accusation was false? And how could she convince Constantine that Fausta had deceived him? Why was Crispus never rehabilitated? This hypothesis leaves too many questions unanswered.³⁷

Hans A. Pohlsander concluded that Fausta's death was somehow caused by Helena, who, he speculates, probably hated her. Yet he found no convincing cause for Crispus' death, nor any convincing connection between Crispus' and Fausta's death.³⁸ Jan Willem Drijvers sees no evidence of a strained relationship between Fausta and Helena and,

³⁶ Some (e.g. Lenski 2007, 79) point out that, at the time, Constantine was dealing with legislation on extramarital affairs (for a brief summary of this legislation see, for example, Odahl 2013, 204; for a more extensive explanation, see Harries (2012, 148–155), and Humfress (2007, 205–221). But this in no way gives a reason for Constantine's sudden, brutal, and never explained or justified intervention within his own family.

³⁷ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 205–208. Similarly, Van Dam (2008, 300).

³⁸ Pohlsander, "Crispus: Brilliant Career and Tragic End". Elsewhere (2004, 56–58), Pohlsander emphasises the suddenness and unexpectedness of Crispus' execution and notes that there are no signs of alienation between son and father. He argues that the son was unlikely to have been conspiring against his father.

above all, no motivation for Helena to remove Fausta. He, too, offers no explanation for the deaths of Crispus and Fausta.³⁹

If we accept the working hypothesis that the sources dating to the late 4th and the fifth century (the *Epitome*, Philostorgius, Zosimus, and Zonaras) do not actually tell us the reasons for Crispus' execution—since, lacking any meaningful information to report, they resort to fiction—then we must conclude that there is a significant probability that Crispus' death and Fausta's disappearance were two distinct, unrelated events. This removes not only the unconvincing sexual motive, but also Fausta's ill-conceived and very risky power machinations. We are left with merely a handful of early sources (Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Jerome), which offer only sketchy accounts. To sum up, Aurelius Victor merely mentions Crispus' execution, emphasising the ambiguity of its cause, while both Eutropius and Jerome refer to the deaths of Crispus and Licinius the younger as having happened simultaneously, perhaps suggesting a link between their executions. Was there any political background to Crispus' case? Eutropius lists the deaths of Crispus, Licinius the younger, and Fausta in a single sentence, but he does make a distinction: the first to die were Crispus and Licinius, then Fausta, and then “many friends” of Constantine. As for the causes of these deaths, Eutropius hints at a change in Constantine's personality during the second phase of his reign.

The disappearance of Fausta may have had nothing to do with the execution of Crispus; after all, she may have committed another, unrelated crime (e.g. adultery with a male servant). The case of Crispus strongly suggests a political backdrop, something that was or appeared to be a real threat to Constantine. We must take Crispus' *damnatio memoriae* into account. As we have previously shown, this act was applied in purely political cases, particularly when a ruling emperor wanted to distance himself from the previous ruler (conversely, if he wanted to show his approval and emphasise continuity with the previous reign, there was *consecratio*). The *damnatio memoriae* and information embargo, which no author of Constantine's age dared violate, at the very least remove the possibility that the case of Crispus was a mistake, a misunderstanding, or a sudden impulse that the emperor would later regret. The memory of Crispus and Fausta was apparently condemned at the same time; that indicates, perhaps falsely and misleadingly, that they were being punished for the

³⁹ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 60–62.

same reason. We do not know where Fausta's guilt lies, but, in Crispus' case, Constantine seems to have perceived some form of betrayal. Crispus, it appears, suddenly and unexpectedly dashed all the hopes the emperor had been pinning on him. Whatever he did, it was punishable by death and even *damnatio memoriae*. But what was it?

In his attempt to reconstruct Fausta's case, Timothy Barnes focused on the strange method of her death mentioned by some of our sources. He claimed that if Fausta had actually perished in an overheated bath, then her death could not be an execution, because such a form of capital punishment is unknown to Roman law. Two possible causes of death thus come into consideration: an accident (hyperthermia induced by an excessively hot bath) or suicide. Barnes preferred the latter, explaining that Fausta simply wished to avoid a worse form of death, i.e. execution. He therefore accepts the hypothesis that Fausta was actively involved in Crispus' downfall by making a false accusation that duped Constantine into ordering his son's execution.⁴⁰ This hypothesis, however, does not explain why the *damnatio memoriae* was applied to both Fausta and Crispus. If Constantine genuinely regretted his decision to put his son to death, why did he persist in the condemnation of his memory?⁴¹ So much so that Crispus' damnation was permanent and was not limited to records and inscriptions: after his execution, his palace in Trier was razed and a church built in its place.⁴²

Having examined and rejected all other possibilities—the sexual motive and any other possible connection between Crispus' and Fausta's cases—there is no alternative but to explore further the possibility of a political motive. Manfred Clauss' attention was drawn to Eutropius' short statement that the deaths of Crispus, Licinius the younger, and Fausta were followed by the deaths of “many friends” (*numerosos amicos*). Clauss wonders whether Crispus was plotting a conspiracy on the occasion of

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Constantine*, 147–148. Barnes offers another line of speculation on Fausta's death, positing that she may have attempted to induce an abortion. This hypothesis, which brings the sexual motive back into play, is unconvincing and is rejected by Barnes, but further investigated by Stephenson (2010, 222–223).

⁴¹ Odahl (2013, 208) tried to explain Crispus' *damnatio memoriae* by asserting that Constantine felt too ashamed to publicly admit his guilt; for the same reason, he never visited Italy again. Stephenson (2010, 223) concurs (although he does actually contemplate that there may be incest between Fausta and Crispus).

⁴² Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 25; Stephenson, *Constantine*, 223.

the *vicennalia* celebrations; perhaps Crispus had misunderstood his father and believed that now, in 326, there was to be a repeat of the same ceremony from 305—a transfer of imperial power.⁴³ It is difficult to imagine that Crispus could have been so naive.

A variation on Clauss' hypothesis was offered by Jill Harries. She contemplated a conspiracy by Fausta and Crispus to remove Constantine from power. According to Harries, Fausta could offer dynastic legitimacy; Crispus, therefore, would supplant his father not only as ruler, but also as Fausta's husband. This highly improbable combination of sexual and political motives has one advantage: it explains the *damnatio memoriae* of both Crispus and Fausta.⁴⁴

Yet another option was considered by Robert M. Frakes, who focused on the identity of Crispus' wife, Helena. Frakes suggested that she was a daughter of the emperor Licinius; indeed, it would be only natural for the two rulers to reaffirm their renewed alliance in 321 or earlier by having their children marry each other, just as they had cemented their alliance in 313 by the marriage of Licinius himself to one of Constantine's sisters, Constantia. A daughter of Licinius from a previous marriage or concubinage would fit into this scheme quite well.⁴⁵ Licinius the younger would thus have been a half-brother of this Helena, since he was born of Licinius' later marriage to Constantia, and would then become both Crispus' cousin and brother-in-law. This hypothesis explains why Eutropius and Jerome name Crispus and Licinius the younger jointly as victims of Constantine. In this version, the conspiracy plotted against Constantine would have revolved around Licinius the younger rather than Crispus. It is conceivable that the 11-year-old boy became a rallying point for all the emperor Licinius' courtiers and other people of importance to him, who had once served him loyally and now were understandably enraged at Constantine's treachery in breaking his oath by having their former lord murdered. The plan would have aimed to oust Constantine, proclaim Crispus the emperor of the Western part of the Empire, and make Licinius the younger the emperor in the East. The role of Fausta is the weak point in this hypothesis, as she would not have been interested in such redistribution of power. Did she warn Constantine? Frakes suggested that

⁴³ Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 50–51. Similarly, Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 243–247.

⁴⁴ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 260.

⁴⁵ Frakes, "The Dynasty of Constantine Down to 363", 95.

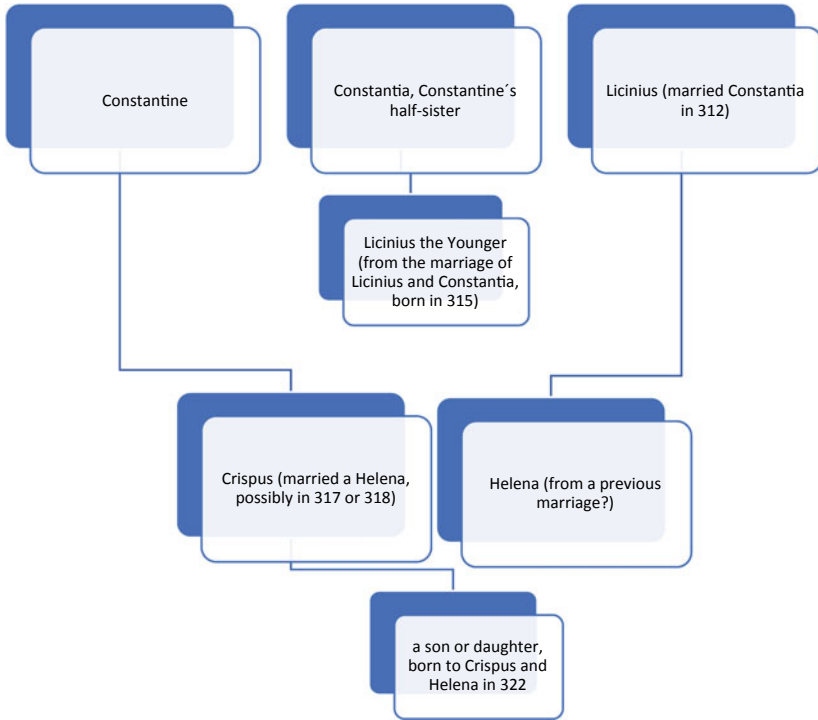
“she urged her husband to suspect his eldest son too quickly”, but that does not explain her grim fate afterwards. Again, we are led to conclude that Fausta’s case was probably unrelated to that of Crispus. Although she may have benefited from his removal, anyone could have passed on information about this impending conspiracy to Constantine.

The same holds true for Helena, the mother of Constantine. She, too, may have been involved in this story, but not in the way our sources suggest. We know that, shortly after Crispus’ death and Constantine’s *vicennalia*, she set out on a journey through the Eastern provinces.⁴⁶ She enjoyed extensive powers bestowed on her by her son, including the possibility of spending money from the imperial treasury. Hal Drake remarked that some recent scholars “have described Helena’s pilgrimage as a propaganda stunt to divert public attention” from the execution of Crispus.⁴⁷ But her journey might well have been both a pilgrimage and a political mission. Drijvers noticed that Helena, on her way through the Eastern provinces, spent money generously, distributing it not only to cities and poor individuals who approached her, but also to military units. It was not usual for soldiers to receive their *donativa* for nothing. Was this an attempt to reconcile mutinous or disgruntled soldiers in the East and win their loyalty for Constantine?⁴⁸ Admittedly, our sources offer no causal link between Crispus’ execution and Helena’s journey. But why should they? If the true purpose of her journey was a well-camouflaged political mission, then no one could know for sure. This hypothesis’ weakness is that we know of no unrest among military units in the East at that time, nor are we informed of any punitive action against Licinius’ people (not to mention the fact that we still have no explanation for the removal of Fausta). Even so, this political motive still appears to be the most likely explanation for the crown prince’s violent end (Genealogical Chart 9.1).

⁴⁶ Euseb. *VC* III, 42–45. According to Pohlsander (2004, 59), Helena’s journey took place in 326–328; Lenski (2007, 79) dates her departure to the East to 327.

⁴⁷ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 237. Later, however, Drake himself changed his stance somewhat by suggesting that Helena was tasked primarily with appeasing the elite in the East, who were concerned about the emperor’s inexplicable behaviour regarding Crispus’ sudden death (Drake 2017, 105–106).

⁴⁸ Drijvers (1992, 68–69): “Should we conclude that Helena gave richly to several military units in order to conciliate them and make them loyal to Constantine?” Drijvers points out, in particular, that there was nothing to celebrate at that time (e.g. birthdays of members of the imperial house). For details on the *donative*, see Hebblewhite (2017, 76–89).



Genealogical Chart 9.1 A proposed connection between the houses of Constantine and Licinius

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The Final 10 Years

According to Eutropius, Constantine could be ranked among the very best emperors in the initial phase of his reign, but among mediocre ones towards the end.¹ The *Epitome* is a lot more outspoken: Constantine ruled well for the first 10 years, as a villain for the next 12, and as a ward in need of supervision for the last 10 because of all the money he was squandering.² There can be no denying the fact that, following his ultimate victory over Licinius, Constantine spared no expense. He built a whole new city (Constantinople), constructed churches, and was very generous to his friends. Eusebius praises him for this, but Ammianus Marcellinus says that Constantine was “the first of all to open the maws of his confidants”; other sources agree.³

¹ Eutr. X, 7 (*vir primo imperii tempore optimis principibus, ultimo mediis comparandus*).

² *Epitome* 41, 16 (*decem annis praestantissimus, duodecim sequentibus latro, decem novissimis pupillus ob profusiones immodicas nominatus*).

³ Euseb. *VC* IV, 1–4; *Amm. Marc.* XVI, 8, 12. Aurelius Victor (40, 15) also takes a negative view of Constantine’s generosity (*munificentia*); Zosimus (II, 32, 1) specifically says that state money was wasted. The anonymous *De rebus bellicis* (2, 1–3) recounts Constantine’s greed (*avaritia*) and profligacy (*profusa largitio*). Even the *Origo* (6, 30), usually favourably disposed to Constantine, says that he all but exhausted all the wealth of the state in building Constantinople (*prope in ea omnes thesauros et regias facultates exhauriret*).

Between Crispus' death and the end of his reign, Constantine did not have to deal with any political crises. As Manfred Clauss put it rather bruisingly, "he had peace within the family from then on".⁴ All that could perturb him was the matter of succession, since his three remaining sons had yet to reach adulthood. Constantine had started occupying himself with plans for the future political organisation of the empire by the early 330s, when he seems to have entertained the idea of restoring the tetrarchy in some form, albeit on a dynastic basis (as discussed in more detail in the next chapter). For now, the office of praetorian prefect was earmarked to provide his sons with support in their future rule.

PREFECTURES

Zosimus is exaggerating when he says that Constantine introduced regional prefectures; he literally says that Constantine "fashioned out of one office four", i.e. he placed each region under the administration of its own prefect.⁵ However, these regional powers of the prefects are attested only from a time after Constantine's death (from the 340s), and the firmly established system of four prefectures was actually created even later, during the Valentinian dynasty (in the 360s).⁶ So what changes did take place under Constantine? We have already seen how the office of praetorian prefect evolved during the first tetrarchy. For the period of the second tetrarchy and Constantine's rise to power in the West (305–312), there is scant information available to reconstruct the history of this office (and the names we do have cannot always be reliably assigned to individual emperors). We can assume, though, that each *augustus* continued to have his own praetorian prefect. For Galerius, Severus, and Licinius, only one is attested in this period (for 310, 307, and 310–314); one is also attested (311–312) for Maximinus Daia once he became an *augustus*. Paradoxically, we are best informed about the prefects of the usurper Maxentius: he had three (one after the other) in the years 306–312. We have witnessed how Constantine, after his conquest of Rome in 312, abolished the local

⁴ Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 51 ("innerhalb der Familie hatte er fortan Ruhe").

⁵ Zos. II, 33, 1–2.

⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 158; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 138.

praetorian guard, or rather what was left of it, but the office of praetorian prefect—aside from a further reduction of military powers—did not undergo any sweeping changes at this time.⁷

We do not even know much about the subsequent period up to 324. Licinius' praetorian prefect from 315 to 324 was Julius Julianus, but the first praetorian prefect of Constantine that we can name is the one from 315: Petronius Annianus, consul in 314, who is attested in office until 317.⁸ Only these two prefects were in office in 317, as there were only two reigning emperors. Petronius was followed in 317 or 318 by Junius Bassus (to whom many of Constantine's laws are addressed). It seems to have been at this point that Constantine changed the system established by Diocletian in that he probably placed Junius Bassus at the disposal of his son Crispus, to whom he entrusted Gaul, Britain, and likely also Hispania. In doing so, Constantine broke the rule of "as many prefects as there are emperors", because now not only Constantine and Licinius, but also Crispus, a mere *caesar*, had a prefect. In 324, when Crispus joined his father as he went to war with Licinius, Bassus remained in Gaul. He continued to administer the territories entrusted to him even after Crispus' death—probably until 331, when he became consul.⁹ While there was still a long way to go before the formation of the regional prefectures we know from later times, it was a step in that direction. In any event, the suggestion that there were four prefectures in the empire as early as 314, as suggested by Paul Stephenson, cannot possibly be right.¹⁰ Since the empire at that time was ruled by just Constantine and Licinius, this meant that each would have had two prefects, an arrangement that would have been premature at this point and, more importantly, would have served no purpose.

It is difficult enough to get a clear picture of the prefectures in 312–324, but that is nothing compared to the complete mess of 324–337. Our

⁷ For lists of the names of these prefects, see *PLRE I*, 1047–1048; Barnes (1982, 124–128).

⁸ *PLRE I*, 68–69. According to Barnes (1982, 127), he may have been prefect from as early as 312 to at least 317.

⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 158; Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 129; *PLRE I*, 154. We know that Junius Bassus was praetorian prefect for 14 years, probably from 318 until 331, when he also became consul. *PLRE I* (1048) suggests that Bassus was not sent to Gaul with Crispus until 320.

¹⁰ Stephenson, *Constantine*, 237.

present state of knowledge makes it difficult to say who was prefect to whom (and where), because the names that are attested are too many for us to assign them to Constantine and his sons.¹¹ The number of prefects at this time gradually rose to five and perhaps even six, not all of whom can be localised. From what we can discern, one seems to have served in Italy and another in Gaul, one was present at Constantine's court, and another was in Africa¹²—in 332–337, there was a specially created African prefecture with a prefect who was not present at any court.¹³ This, too, is evidence of the trend (and so far nothing more than a trend, since this prefecture was abolished after Constantine's death) towards the creation of regional prefectures.

Chronologically, this development can be summarised as follows: at the end of 312, each emperor (Constantine, Licinius, and Maximinus Daia) had his own prefect. About five years later, there were still three prefects, as Constantine and Licinius each had a prefect, and one was assigned to the *caesar* Crispus. After Licinius had been defeated for good in 324, there were only two prefects in the empire—those of Constantine and Crispus. After Crispus' death, there seems to have been a period in which the empire had only one prefect. Although Constantine II had become *caesar* in 317, followed by Constantius II in 324, when we consider how young they were they are unlikely to have needed prefects before about 330, when they would have been 13 or 14 years old. We can therefore reckon on three prefects in around 330. Their number subsequently grew as more members of the dynasty were added to the college of *caesares*: Constans, Constantine's youngest son (then about 10 years old), became

¹¹ *PLRE I* (1048) addresses this situation by assuming that prefects would frequently change or transfer between courts, which Barnes (1982, 139) criticises (“too many are attested for all to be assigned to emperors”).

¹² Barnes (2014, 161) lists five prefects as early as 331, i.e. before the African prefecture was established; however, the inscription Barnes cites is not intact, so the identification of some names is uncertain. According to Barnes, in that year Ablabius was at Constantine's court (in Constantinople or Nicomedia), Bassus was in Gaul, and Pacatianus was in Italy, but it is not clear where Evagrius and Valerius Maximus served.

¹³ L. Aradius Valerius Proculus, during his proconsulship of Africa (probably in 332–333), was simultaneously entrusted by Constantine to supervise all the provinces of the African diocese. This resulted in the office of praetorian prefect of Africa, which Felix (333–336) and Gregorius (336–337) are attested to have held after Proculus. See Barnes (2014, 161–162), *PLRE I*, 1048. Cf. Stephenson (2010, 245–246), who, depicting the situation in 336, treats Felix as Dalmatius' prefect and ignores the existence of the African prefecture.

caesar on 25 December 333, followed two years later, on 18 September 335, by Constantine's nephew Dalmatius, who was about 20 years old. According to Barnes, there were thus six praetorian prefects in the empire at the end of 335: Nestorius Timonianus was serving Constantine in Constantinople; in Antioch, the prefect Flavius Ablabius was assisting Constantius II in his administration of the East; in Gaul, probably at Trier, a certain C. Annius Tiberianus was serving Constantine II (in the administration of Gaul, Britannia, and Hispania); Constans also had his own prefect, L. Papius Pacatianus (for Italy and the Pannonian diocese); in Africa, probably at Carthage, there was Valerius Felix; finally, Dalmatius was also given a prefect, whose sphere of responsibility included the dioceses of Thrace and Moesia.¹⁴

Two years later, there was a radical change in the prefecture situation. Following Constantine's death on 22 May 337, his sons elevated themselves to *augusti* on 9 September and, most importantly, promptly cleared all potential rivals from their path (on this massacre, see the next chapter). The African prefecture was abolished (evidently because the African prefect was overly powerful and could not be controlled). The position of Constantine's prefect was obviously also now defunct. Dalmatius was assassinated in the summer of that year, so his prefecture, too, was abolished. Naturally, each of Constantine's sons retained his own prefect.¹⁵ Thus the number of prefects in the empire was rapidly cut from six to three.

In the second half of Constantine's reign, prefects began to be picked from the senatorial class.¹⁶ Moreover, since the prefects had become the highest civil officials in the empire, they could expect to be accorded all due respect.¹⁷ They were regarded as the emperor's representatives in all administrative and judicial matters, and there was no appeal against

¹⁴ See Barnes (2014, 163), who here revises his own earlier conclusions (Barnes 1982, 138–139). There is no consensus on this matter: Stephenson (2010, 246) assigns Ablabius to Constantine and Timonianus to Constantius II; Jones (1964, 102) believes that Timonianus served under Dalmatius and Evagrius under Constantine.

¹⁵ If Constantius II's prefect was Ablabius, he must have been replaced by someone else—perhaps Septimius Acindynus (see *PLRE I*, 11) – because he died in 337 (see the next chapter).

¹⁶ Southern (2004, 257) argues that this was the case from 324 onwards.

¹⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus (XXI, 16, 2) says that, under the reign of Constantius II (337–361), all civil and military officials “in keeping with the custom of ancient reverence” (*priscae reverentiae more*) looked up to the praetorian prefects as the “apex of all ranks”

their judgements. In the last decade, praetorian prefects also tended to be consuls.¹⁸

DMOCESES AND PROVINCES

Following Diocletian's reign, these two other levels in the administration of the empire were more or less preserved in the form in which he established them. The *Laterculus Veronensis*, listing the provinces probably as they were in 314, reveals how Constantine and Licinius revised the way provinces were organised.¹⁹ Changes were made, for example, in Egypt, which Diocletian had already split into a southern part (a province called Thebais, ruled by a *praeses*) and a northern part (Egypt proper, under an official with the title *praefectus Aegypti*) in the 290s. By the time Licinius had command of the East, evidently in 314 or 315, Egypt proper had been divided into two provinces, *Aegyptus Iovia* and *Aegyptus Herculia* (each governed by a *praeses*). However, this was a short-lived change lasting only until Constantine took control of the East and reunited Egypt (in its northern part) by restoring its prefect.²⁰ Constantine was not one to tamper with the empire's administrative system at the level of the provinces and dioceses; more significant changes here would occur only under Constantine's successors.²¹ His renaming of the deputy to the praetorian prefect in the diocese of *Oriens* might be described as a cosmetic change: this official, the *vicarius Orientis*, became the *comes*

(*apex omnium honorum*). The *Notitia Dignitatum* also places these prefects first among all dignitaries.

¹⁸ Flavius Constantius and Valerius Maximus in 327, Junius Bassus and Flavius Ablabius in 331, Pacatianus in 332.

¹⁹ This is the year put forward by Barnes (2014, 92).

²⁰ Bowman, "Egypt from Septimius Severus to the death of Constantine", 317; Barnes, *Constantine*, 93.

²¹ The total number of dioceses would subsequently increase from twelve to fifteen: Egypt went on to become a diocese, Italy was divided into two dioceses, and the Moesian diocese was also split (into the Dacian and Macedonian dioceses). Jones (1964, 107) argued that the Macedonian diocese had already been established under Constantine, referring to the existence of a certain Acacia attested as *comes Macedoniae* in the law *CTb XI, 3, 2*, of 327 (*PLRE I*, 6). Barnes (1982, 143), on the other hand, believes that Acacius was a special commissioner in Macedonia rather than the diocese's governor.

Orientis, most likely around 330.²² Similarly, from 320 onwards, provincial governors were styled as *consularis*, a title superior to *corrector* and *praeses*, but less honorific than *proconsul*.²³ This complex arrangement of precedence among provincial and diocesan governors echoed the even more intricate world of central offices and ranks at Constantine's court (see below).

CONSTANTINE'S ARMY

If we were to view the division of the Roman army into mobile (*comitatenses*) and frontier units (*limitanei* or *ripenses*) as a process that evolved over time, we could attribute its progression partly to Diocletian and partly to Constantine (on this matter, see Chapter 4). There is no point in trying to pinpoint the exact year in which the mobile army was established, for there was none; this was not consequent upon a single decision. Each of the tetrarchs had at his constant disposal elite escort troops (*comitatus*) that evidently consisted primarily of cavalry. Constantine himself inherited this army from his father and made extensive use of the cavalry and mobile infantry units from the very beginning of his reign, both in his struggle with the Rhenish Germani and in the civil wars of the crumbling tetrarchy (see, for example, the description of his campaign in 310, Appendix D). When he invaded Italy in 312 with only a small part of his army, these were undoubtedly elite troops capable of rapid movement; they may well have formed the core of Constantine's later *comitatenses*.

As discussed in Chapter 4, considerable changes were made to the way military command was organised under Constantine. In the second half of Constantine's reign, perhaps after 324, the military commanders in the provinces (*duces*) no longer answered to the praetorian prefects, but to two generals whose positions had been introduced by Constantine (the *magister peditum* and *magister equitum*).²⁴ The separation of the military and civil spheres of government was thus essentially complete. Soon after

²² Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 142.

²³ The governor of Syria, for example, was originally a *praeses*, but from some 325 onwards is attested here as a *consularis*. The governor of Campania in Italy was initially a *corrector*, but from 324 he is elevated to the rank of *consularis* (Barnes 1982, 153 and 163).

²⁴ Elton, "Warfare and the Military", 331; cf. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 454. See also Chapter 4.

Constantine's death, *comites rei militaris*, commanding detachments of the field army in the provinces, were added to this structure.²⁵

In other respects, Constantine emulated Diocletian. He continued to increase the size of the army at a moderate pace (until it reached some half a million troops; see Appendix C) and to resettle barbarians on Roman soil. We have seen how the tetrarchs herded droves of Bastarnae, Sarmatians, and Carpi into Roman territory; Constantine seems to have followed a similar course of action by resettling groups of Franks and Alamanni in 306–312. In any case, some of the generals or officers of Germanic descent who served Constantine's sons must have begun their careers under Constantine, and it is very likely that they, or their fathers, were among the captives, capitulants, or defectors that Constantine acquired during his battles with the Rhenish Germani in those years. Specifically, we know of a Frank named Bonitus who fought for Constantine in the civil war against Licinius; his son, Silvanus, became a general (*magister peditum*) in Gaul in the early 350s.²⁶ Another German, Flavius Magnus Magnentius, was in command of two legions when his usurpation in Gaul in 350 cost Constantine's son Constans his life. Magnentius' origins are obscure, but he was probably a Frank.²⁷ We have also discussed how the Alamannic leader Crocus, who so staunchly supported Constantine's usurpation, was very prominent at the court of Constantius I.²⁸ Constantine's penchant for barbarians was criticised in 361 by the emperor Julian, who reproached Constantine (somewhat unfairly) for being the first to introduce barbarians into the consulship, and for generally, when it came to barbarians, abolishing old customs and introducing new ones (sadly, Ammianus does not go into detail here;

²⁵ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 105.

²⁶ Amm. Marc. XV, 5, 33.

²⁷ For sources commenting on his origin, see *PLRE I*, 532. Cf. Frakes (2007, 100), who has no doubt that he was “of Frankish origin”.

²⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus and other sources mention a number of other officers and generals who served Constantius II in the 350s. These included Franks, such as Malarichus (Amm. Marc. XV, 5, 6), Alamanni, such as Agilo, Scudilo, and Latinus (Amm. Marc. XIV, 10, 8), and officers or generals of unknown but, judging by their names, probably Germanic origin, such as Theolaifus, Aligildus, Dagalaiifus, and Nevitta (on all of these, see *PLRE I*). For additional (and more controversial) examples, see Barnes (2014, 155–156).

nor does he pursue the matter further).²⁹ This barbarian-friendly policy cannot be attributed to Constantine alone. The Gothic leader Alica and his people fought on Licinius' side at Chrysopolis in 324,³⁰ and we saw in Chapter 3 that emperors from Gallienus to Diocletian displaced large numbers of Germani, resettling them in Roman territory and no doubt enlisting recruits from their ranks. Sometimes the Romans even recruited at source: Probus is said to have rounded up 16,000 men from Germanic tribes, probably the Alamanni, whom he then dispersed in groups of 50 or 60 men among the existing Roman forces in the various provinces. And there were also instances where barbarian chieftains, including their whole retinue, came over to the Roman side. The barbarisation of the Roman army was a process that, by Constantine's time, had been going on for decades; at most, Constantine may have intensified it when, in 306–312, he urgently needed good soldiers for his *comitatus*. Some of these soldiers must have been promoted after demonstrating leadership qualities. This provided the background for the later situation within the Roman army where, in the 350 s and 360 s, we find many officers and generals with non-Roman names.

After Constantine disbanded Maxentius' praetorian guard and the elite *equites singulares Augusti* cavalry guard following the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, he probably subsequently created a new imperial guard known as the *scholae palatinae*.³¹ However, strictly speaking this did not belong to the army because it was part of the structure of the imperial court, which we will look at now.

CONSTANTINE'S COURT AND THE *SACRUM CONSISTORIUM*

During the Principate, the *consilium principis* (the imperial advisory council) was at the heart of the imperial court. It included the heads of central authorities (see Chapter 4), the emperor's friends and advisers

²⁹ Amm. Marc. XXI, 10, 8; 12, 25. According to Barnes (1998, 219; 1981, 403), Ammianus misunderstood Julian, as there were no barbarians among the consuls in Constantine's time; however, by "barbarian", Julian may have been referring to Christians.

³⁰ *Origo* 5, 27.

³¹ This is the view taken by Stephenson (2010, 230–231); Elton (2007, 328); Pohlsander (2004, 78). They are countered by Campbell (2008, 128) and Southern (2004, 158), who argue that the *scholae* units had been introduced by Diocletian.

of equestrian and senatorial origin, legal and financial experts, diplomats, and military commissioners. However, the information that has been handed down to us about the composition and functioning of this body is sketchy and only concerns certain emperors. Each emperor, upon accession, was free to determine the form and functions of his advisory council. Experts could also be called upon to attend the council on an ad hoc basis.³² In other words, this was no invariable and immutable institution. Not to mention the fact, as pointed out by John Crook, that even the name *consilium principis* itself was not official and seldom crops up in our sources.³³ Instead, we find rather more oblique references, such as “friends of the emperor” (*amici principis*) or “persons present at court” (*praesentes*).³⁴ Another vague term is *comitatus*, literally “body of companions”. In some cases, we can be sure that it means the imperial council,³⁵ but sometimes it is ambiguous,³⁶ and in yet other instances it clearly refers to persons who played no role at all in affairs of state, such as personal servants and physicians.³⁷ Whatever the term *comitatus* meant, a member of such a body was a *comes*. A *comes* is a companion, usually someone who is of a lower status than the person he is accompanying, i.e. the term implies subservience or subordination.³⁸ In this sense, starting in the Roman Republic and continuing during the Principate, *comes* had denoted, for example, a member of a provincial governor’s staff accompanying his superior on his travels.

³² Senator Pliny the Younger was twice summoned, as an experienced jurist, to attend meetings of the imperial council of the emperor Trajan, and has left us an account of this (*Epistulae* VI, 33; IV, 22).

³³ Crook, *Consilium principis*, 104.

³⁴ Examples of *amici principis* meaning the imperial council: Tac. *Ann.* I, 6; XIII, 12; Suet. *Ner.* 35, 1; *HA, Alex. Sev.* 65, 4. Example of *praesentes* meaning the imperial council: Tac. *Hist.* II, 65.

³⁵ Suet. *Aug.* 98, 2; *Tib.* 30, 1; 46, 1 *et al.*; Tac. *Ann.* I, 47; *Hist.* I, 23; I, 88; II, 87 *et al.*

³⁶ Tac. *Ann.* XIII, 46; Tac. *Hist.* II, 65; *HA, Anton. Pius* 7, 11 *et al.*

³⁷ The *comitatus* of the emperor Tiberius included the physician Charicles (Tac. *Ann.* VI, 50; Suet. *Tib.* 72, 3) and even the astrologer Thrasyllus (Suet. *Aug.* 98, 4; he is referred to as a *comes*).

³⁸ Etymologically, this word is derived from the prefix *co-* (“jointly”, “together”) and either the verb *meare* or *ire* (both denoting “to go”). See Tucker 1985, 61; Oxford Latin Dictionary (1968, 359).

Constantine turned the term *comes* into a title. Since Constantine was moving about a lot, especially in the first half of his reign, this title was very apt for members of his imperial court. However, Constantine did not limit it to members of his court; important people from outside the court were also made *comites*. The eminent senator and consul C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus boasted the title “*comes* of our lord the invincible Constantine, perpetual *augustus*” as early as 314–315, when he was the urban prefect of Rome.³⁹ There was a change a few years later, when Constantine had conferred the title *comes* on so many military and civil officials that it had to be broken down into three classes (*comes primi ordinis*, *comes secundi ordinis*, *comes tertii ordinis*).⁴⁰ It was no longer sufficient to refer oneself simply as a *comes*. And, as we have seen, the title *comes* was soon also extended to provincial offices and functions, both civil (*comes Orientis*, c. 330) and military (*comes rei militaris*, after 337).

The description of one man’s career will give an idea of the importance of this concept. Sometime between 321 and 324, a certain L. Aradius Valerius Proculus was provincial governor of Byzacena (*praeses Byzacena*, i.e. north-eastern Tunisia); later (shortly after 324) he was appointed governor of the area of present-day southern Bulgaria and the European part of Turkey (*consularis Europae et Thraciae*); after that, sometime before 332, he was governor of Sicily (*consularis Siciliae*). It was around this time that he was given the title *comes ordinis secundi*. He was subsequently made *comes ordinis primi* and became *proconsul Africae*, probably in 332–333; in this capacity, as we have seen above, he was also in charge of supervising all the provinces of the African diocese, i.e. he was the first of the praetorian prefects of Africa. Once he had been succeeded in this office by others, Proculus became (evidently in about 335) a member of Constantine’s advisory council, known as the *sacrum consistorium* (“sacred assembly”), as his title was now *comes iterum ordinis primi intra palatium*. He crowned his glittering career with the urban prefecture of Rome (337–338) and a consulship in 340.⁴¹ He thus worked his way through all the honours that could be conferred within the imperial hierarchy.

³⁹ ILS 1213 (*comes domini nostri Constantini invicti et perpetui semper augusti*). See PLRE I, 976–978; Barnes (1982, 100).

⁴⁰ Eusebius refers to these three classes in Greek in VC IV, 1, 2.

⁴¹ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, (119–120), PLRE I, 747–748.

This *sacrum consistorium* was a new institution created by Constantine.⁴² Its members were called *comites consistoriani*.⁴³ A neologism, *consistorium* does not appear in sources from the Principate period.⁴⁴ It is derived from the verb “to stand” (*consistere*), as the members of the *consistorium* stood in negotiations with the emperor; only the emperor would sit during these sessions.⁴⁵ Like the *consilium principis*, the *consistorium* was made up of the most influential dignitaries, wielding powers of empire-wide reach. Yet even here there was no fixed structure to speak of. One of the reasons for this was the *consistorium*’s very wide-ranging and varied agenda, which tended to require the participation of legal and other experts. In any event, the *consistorium* became the supreme body of executive power and control within state administration and was at the very heart of the imperial court. Its permanent members, in order of importance, were the quaestor (*quaestor sacri palatii*), the chief of the imperial offices (*magister officiorum*), the minister of state finance, and the administrator of the emperor’s estate.⁴⁶ The quaestor presided over the proceedings of the *consistorium* in the emperor’s absence. He was responsible for imperial legislation, but had no office of his own and,

⁴² Corcoran (2000, 255–262; 2007, 43), however, argues that there was still a *consilium* under Constantine and that the *consistorium* did not come into being until later, though some official positions related to the *consistorium*—such as the *magister officiorum* and the generals of the field army (*magistri militum*), and probably also the quaestor and the two finance ministers (see below)—were indeed created under Constantine. Barnes (2014, 216) assumes that the *consistorium* existed under Constantine.

⁴³ Sometimes they were referred to simply as *consistoriani*; see Amm. Marc. XV, 5, 12, *et al.*

⁴⁴ Sources give the alternative names of *sacrarium* or *comitatus* for this imperial council. In the *Codex Theodosius*, the term *sacrarium* occurs seven times (e.g. *CTh* IX, 40, 11) and *consistorium* fifteen times (e.g. *CTh* I, 22, 4), while *comitatus* can be found more than forty times in this sense (e.g. *CTh* I, 16, 2). *Comitatus* sometimes denoted the court more generally, and in the tetrarchic period the tetrarchs’ mobile divisions were also so called.

⁴⁵ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 78; Corcoran, “Before Constantine”, 43.

⁴⁶ The office of quaestor probably originated under Constantine, but the first mention of a quaestor by name was in 354 (Harries 1988, 154; 2012, 143). The same can be said of the two finance ministers. The names of individuals who held these offices are first documented in the 340 s (Harries 2012, 141–142).

when necessary, brought in staff from the court offices in order to carry out his duties.⁴⁷

The quaestor was surpassed in importance by the *magister officiorum* in the second half of the fourth century.⁴⁸ As the name implies, the *magister officiorum* was initially a kind of “master”, or chief, of the imperial offices (*officia*), but then accumulated much more power over time. Once Constantine had established this office (evidently as early as 313),⁴⁹ he made the traditional court offices—i.e. the *scrinium memoriae*, *scrinium epistularum* (*Latinarum et Graecarum*), and *scrinium libellorum*—subordinate to it.⁵⁰ In 319, special commissioners sent to the provinces with letters for the provincial governors and bringing reports back to the court (*agentes in rebus*) are attested under the *magister officiorum*’s authority; these agents must therefore have been at the disposal of both Constantine and Licinius. The *magister officiorum* was also given command of the troops of the new palace guard (*scholae palatinae*), which was evidently created by Constantine, probably after the dissolution of the rest of the praetorian guard in Rome. Towards the end of Constantine’s reign, the *scholae palatinae* comprised five 500-man elite cavalry units.⁵¹ In addition, there continued to be *protectores* at court (as discussed in Chapter 3); these now formed a kind of officers’ school or military academy and were promoted both to the command of troops in the field and to the staff of the two generals (*magistri militum*).⁵² By the middle of the fourth century they had been divided into two classes: one lower (*protectores*), the other higher (*protectores domestici*).⁵³ By the end of the fourth century, the competence of the *magister officiorum* had expanded to include foreign relations, the imperial courier service (*cursus*

⁴⁷ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Oriens 12 (*officium non habet, sed adiutores de scriniis quos voluerit*).

⁴⁸ Clauss, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike*, 130.

⁴⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 91. Cf. Harries (2012, 140) (“probably soon after 312”); Clauss (1981, 13) (in 314).

⁵⁰ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 140. According to Jones (1964, 103), an office had been created under Constantine to take care of audiences with the emperor (*officium admissionum*); this too was controlled by the *magister officiorum*.

⁵¹ Clauss, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike*, 10–14.

⁵² Elton, “Warfare and the Military”, 328.

⁵³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 636.

publicus), state arms factories (*fabricae*), and lower offices at the imperial court.⁵⁴

The minister of state finance and the administrator of the emperor's estate were also members of the *consistorium*. The former was called *rationalis summae rei* during the tetrarchy, but around 325 he began to be titled *comes sacrarum largitionum*. He was in charge of the collection of indirect taxes (such as customs duties), the mining of precious metals, and the mints. The administrator of the emperor's estate (*magister rei privatae*) was also renamed; from around 337, he started to be known as the *comes rei privatae*.⁵⁵ This official was in charge of acquiring, leasing, selling, and profiting from the imperial domains. It should be recalled that the praetorian prefect was also a finance minister in a way, since he was in charge of supplies to the army (*annona*), so we can assume that he also attended meetings of Constantine's *consistorium*. Following the creation of the office of the two chief generals present at the imperial court (*magistri militum in praesenti* or *praesentales*), these generals also became members of the *consistorium*; the first commanders in this rank are attested from the reign of Constantius II.⁵⁶

While the old title of *comes* was institutionalised by Constantine, the very old republican designation of *patricius* was reintroduced as a new title that, this time, was not hereditary, but was granted to a very small number of people for merit. Incidentally, Constantine took similar inspiration from the archaic Roman past when he created the ranks of *magister equitum* and *magister peditum* (during the Roman Republic, the former had denoted the dictator's lieutenant). The title of *clarissimus* was retained for senators; although hereditary, it did not now mean much in

⁵⁴ These lower offices included officials in charge of arranging accommodation for troops on the move (*mensores*), interpreters (*interpretes diversarum gentium*), doorkeepers (*decani*), grooms (*stratores*), torchbearers (*lampadarii*), runners (*cursores*), and notaries (*notarii*). The *magister officiorum* originally had the rank of *tribunus*, but as early as the mid-fourth century this official is attested with the title of first-class *comes* (*comes primi ordinis*). This was echoed by the progression in the classes of ranks: originally *vir clarissimus*, then *vir spectabilis*, and by the beginning of the fifth century *vir illustris* (these classes are discussed below).

⁵⁵ Kelly, "Bureaucracy and Government", 190.

⁵⁶ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 537. The position of "regional general" (for Illyricum, Gaul, and the Eastern prefectures) was also created at this time.

itself unless the holder held an important office.⁵⁷ Eusebius testifies that Constantine appointed “innumerable” people to this status.⁵⁸ It stands to reason that it then lost some of its lustre.⁵⁹

MONETARY AND TAX SYSTEM

In Chapter 4, we saw how Diocletian tried—not entirely successfully—to reform the currency in the second half of his reign. Constantine also had a go at monetary reform, but took a totally different approach that proved much more successful. Sixteen mints were coining money in Constantine’s time, three in the West (London, Trier, and Lyons), four in Italy (Ticinum, Aquileia, Rome, and Ostia), one in Africa (Carthage), four in the Balkans (Siscia, Serdica, Thessalonica, and Heracleia), and four in the East (Nicomedia, Cyzicus, Antioch, and Alexandria). However, not all of them were in operation throughout that time; for example, in 306 Ostia had yet to open, and coin production in Thessalonica was temporarily interrupted. Although most of these mints struck all types of coins, i.e. gold, silver, and *aes* (copper or bronze), one of them (Heracleia) struck only silver and *aes* coins, and two others (London and Lyons) only produced *aes*.⁶⁰ For Constantine, the mint at Trier was by far the most important in the first phase of his reign (306–312), as it was the only one in the West to strike coins from all metals; it also issued the most coins.

We already know that Constantine seized Gaul and Hispania shortly after his usurpation (at the end of 306). At the beginning of the following year, by which time he had put down roots in Trier, he made a major coinage decision: he had the weight of the *nummi* reduced. It is worth remembering that the *nummus*, or *folles*, was a coin made of silver-washed

⁵⁷ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 528; Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, (103–104).

⁵⁸ Euseb. *VC* IV, 1, 2. Eusebius’ use of the Greek term *mýrioi* (μύριοι) is problematic because it can refer to any large quantity. Cameron and Hall (1999, 155) translate it as “many thousands”.

⁵⁹ To make up for this, two other classes of rank superior to *clarissimi* were created in the second half of the *fourth* century: the higher *spectabiles*, which included proconsuls, diocesan governors, *duces*, *comites rei militaris*, and *magistri scriniorum*, and the even higher *illustres*, which included praetorian prefects, urban prefects, generals, and members of the *consistorium*.

⁶⁰ Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 4–6.

bronze and weighed about 10 g; not only did it form the backbone of the circulation system, but it was also quite valuable (1 *argenteus* = 4 *nummi* = 25 “new” or old *aureliani* = 100 *dc*). Constantine reduced the weight of the *nummus* to 9–7 g in March or April 307, and then to 8–6 g in the summer of the same year. Subsequently, the *nummus* remained stable at 7–6 g until 309. In 309–310, there was a further drop in weight to 5–4 g.⁶¹ In 313, the *nummus* weighed just 4–3 g and its silver content had shrunk from an original 4% or so to a mere 1–2%.⁶² Following Constantine’s victory over Maxentius, his *nummi* were minted in Italy, too. Licinius also subscribed to this standard in 313. The weight of the coin continued to decrease: the *nummus* still weighed 3 g in 318, but it had shrunk to only 2.5 g in 330, and a mere 1.7 g in 335–336.⁶³ Although the *nummus* became steadily smaller during Constantine’s reign, the number in circulation increased.⁶⁴ Minting of the “new *aureliani*” and “new *denarii*” ceased soon after Diocletian’s abdication. The *nummus* itself was probably still worth 25 *dc*, but it is not known whether or when this nominal value was changed.⁶⁵ In any case, the old *denarii*, now a completely virtual currency, were still used for pricing purposes.⁶⁶

As for gold coining, Diocletian’s “reform” *aurei* (weighing 5.3 g) were minted in Trier until the autumn of 307. When, after a hiatus, gold coin production was resumed by Constantine in 309, the mint started issuing different coins known as *solidi*. Constantine had the weight of the *aureus* reduced to 4.55 g without impairing its purity. This meant that a pound of gold could be used to produce 72 instead of the previous 60 gold coins.⁶⁷ Later in 309, fractions of the *solidus* were also minted in Trier:

⁶¹ Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 39–41.

⁶² Bruun, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VII*, 9; Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 100–102; Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 337.

⁶³ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 393; Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 337.

⁶⁴ Depeyrot, “Economy and Society”, 237.

⁶⁵ This is how Corbier (2008, 337) interprets the *nummi* minted by Constantine at Lugdunum (present-day Lyons, France) in 308 or 309. They are marked “CI:HS”, which could be taken to mean their value (100 *sestertii* or 25 *dc*). See Sutherland (1967, 263).

⁶⁶ See Corbier (2008, 338), who refers to inscription ILS 9420 of 323.

⁶⁷ Depeyrot, “Economy and Society”, 237; Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 136; Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 100. The theoretical weight of the *solidus* would have been 4.55 g.

the half-*solidus* (*quinarius*) with a theoretical weight of 2.27 g and the one-third *solidus* (*tremissis*) with a theoretical weight of 1.71 g. There were also multiples of the *solidus*, such as the 1.5-*solidus*, the two-*solidus*, and the 2.5-*solidus*. *Solidi* could happily circulate together with Diocletian's *aurei* because they were interconvertible (5 *aurei* = 6 *solidi*).⁶⁸ Consequently, from 309 onwards a double standard was in place for gold coins in the empire. After Constantine triumphed over Maxentius in 312, the minting and use of *solidi* spread throughout the West. Once Constantine became lord of the whole empire in 324, he gained access not only to Licinius' financial reserves and gold mines, but also to the pagan temples in the East, where gold was stored in abundance. Constantine confiscated this gold and converted it into *solidi*, which he gradually put into circulation.⁶⁹ Constantine was the first ruler in centuries to successfully introduce a new gold coin into circulation, and in sufficient quantities. Not only that, but the *solidus* also proved to be a very stable medium of exchange. It served the Roman and Byzantine emperors unchanged for an incredible 700 years.⁷⁰

Silver coins—Diocletian's *argentei*—were minted by Constantine only in the early days of his reign; they soon disappeared throughout the empire. After 305, the only mints to strike silver coins were at Aquileia, Carthage, and Serdica (until 307), Trier and Ostia (until 309), and Rome (until 310).⁷¹ Around 320, Constantine attempted to reintroduce silver coins, both Diocletian's *argenteus*, conventionally called the *siliqua* by numismatists (one pound of silver made 96 *siliquae*, i.e. each theoretically weighed 3.41 g), and a slightly heavier silver coin known as the *miliarensis* (72 *miliarensia* were minted from one pound, making them as heavy as the *solidus*, i.e. theoretically 4.55 g).⁷² When Constantine died, *solidi*,

⁶⁸ Bruun, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VII*, 1.

⁶⁹ Depeyrot, "Economy and Society", 237; Barnes, *Constantine*, 130–131. This looting of temple treasures is criticised by the anonymous *De rebus bellicis* (2, 1–2). Cf. Cameron (2008, 103), who argues that "actual confiscation was probably limited" and had little impact on the expansion of *solidus* minting.

⁷⁰ The *solidus* was not debased until around 1050 (by which time it had the Greek name of *nomisma*), when its purity shrank by a full quarter to 18 carats (Treadgold 1997, 595).

⁷¹ Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VI*, 43.

⁷² The *miliarensis* is the name given to this coin, for instance, by Bruun (1966, 4); other authors (e.g. Corbier 2008, 337) call it the *miliarensis*.

the two types of silver coin, plus a debased descendant of Diocletian's *nummus*, were in circulation in his empire.⁷³

It is difficult to determine the relationship between these coins because we have virtually nothing to go on other than the coins themselves—literature, legal sources, and inscriptions provide very little information. Going by the weight of silver coins, we can assume that 3 *miliarensia* were equivalent to 4 *siliquae*.⁷⁴ As for their rate relative to the *solidus*, this depends on the gold-to-silver ratio. We know that this was 1:12 after the promulgation of Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices in 301 (see Chapter 4). Equally heavy (and comparably pure) *solidi* and *miliarensia* should thus have been exchanged at a rate of 1 *solidus* = 12 *miliarensia*. More broadly, 1 *solidus* = 12 *miliarensia* = 16 *siliquae*.⁷⁵ However, the word *siliqua* itself implies a somewhat different relationship to the *solidus*, since it was originally used to express weight: a *siliqua* was equal to 1/1728 lb or 1/24 of a *solidus*, i.e. 0.19 g of gold. If a silver *siliqua* coin weighed 3.41 g and was worth 0.19 g of gold, simple arithmetic tells us that 1 g of gold = approximately 18 g of silver.⁷⁶ In the first quarter of the fourth century, the gold-to-silver ratio thus appears to have been 1:18, and in Constantine's time 1 *solidus* = 18 *miliarensia* = 24 *siliquae*.⁷⁷ We know that the price of silver rose during this period; but the price of gold must have risen a little more still.⁷⁸ Conversely, the correlation between the *solidus* and the *nummus* was fluid. The *solidus* remained at a constant purity and weight, but the silver content of the *nummus*, and especially

⁷³ Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy*, 467. From about 337 there was a third silver coin: the "heavy *miliarensis*" weighing of one sixtieth of a pound, i.e. 5.45 g.

⁷⁴ Bruun, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VII*, 6.

⁷⁵ Mattingly (1946, 116), however, proposed that 1 *solidus* = 12 *miliarensia* = 24 *siliquae*.

⁷⁶ Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy*, 467.

⁷⁷ See Adelson (1957, 129), Cf. Češka (2000, 80), who offers a conversion rate of 1 *solidus* = 24 *siliquae*, but assumes a weight of 2.27 g for this silver coin, which is too low. He is evidently working with a ratio of 1:12 here, but this was bound to have changed over time. A law issued in 397 (*CJ* X, 78, 1) fixes the value of 1 pound of silver at 5 *solidi*, giving a gold-to-silver ratio of 1:14.4, and thus a ratio of 1 *solidus* = 14 *miliarensia* at the end of the fourth century. There is therefore some truth in Depeyrot's claim (2007, 239) that the *solidus* was a floating currency.

⁷⁸ Depeyrot (2007, 236) estimates that the price of gold rose by 17% annually between 300 and 367.

its weight, declined rapidly. The value of the diminishing *nummus* relative to the stable *solidus* was therefore constantly changing and is impossible for us to pin down.⁷⁹

Several factors were linked to Constantine's successful introduction of the *solidus* into circulation: the *solidus* was lighter and could be minted in larger batches than the *aureus* from the start; as Constantine gradually took possession of the entire empire, he converted the gold reserves he had acquired into *solidi*, and in this way he returned gold to a place where it had been all but absent for decades—circulation. Once sufficient quantities of *solidi* were in circulation, the basis for a new coinage system was established: the *solidus* gradually displaced silver coins to become the reference coin. During the *fourth* century, values stopped being expressed in *denarii* in favour of *solidi*.⁸⁰ Now that ample gold (and also silver) coins had been minted, soldiers could continue to be paid *stipendia* and, most importantly, *donativa* in them (see Chapter 3). Another upside was that the government was able to create financial reserves in *solidi*. The release of large quantities of *solidi* into circulation also had a significant effect on the tax system. Constantine created two new taxes: one was an annual tax on senators' land (*collatio glebalis* or *follis senatorius*); the other (*collatio lustralis*) was levied on merchants in the cities once every five years and was paid in gold and silver, hence its Greek name (*chrȳsargyron*, a compound of *chrȳsos*—gold—and *argyron*—silver).⁸¹ The most important impact that *solidi* had on the tax system was that the government was gradually able to begin collecting taxes in these coins and then use them to pay the wages of soldiers and officials.⁸² Nevertheless, the commuting of dues in kind to cash payments (*adaeratio*) was a long-term process that started in the early fourth century and continued under Constantine's successors.⁸³

⁷⁹ Mattingly, "The Monetary Systems of the Roman Empire", 116.

⁸⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 394.

⁸¹ Zos. II, 38. See Odahl (2013, 230), Pohlsander (2004, 76), Corbier (2008, 384), Potter (2004, 397), Jones (1964, 431).

⁸² Lo Cascio, "The emperor and his administration", 179; Depuyrot, "Economy and Society", 237; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 441.

⁸³ Otherwise, Constantine intervened in the tax system introduced by Diocletian (for a description of which see Chapter 4) only by changing the periodicity of the tax assessment (*capitatio* and *jugatio*) from every 5 years under Diocletian to every 15 years as of 312.

CONSTANTINOPLE

We have seen that Constantine's most frequent residence during the first phase of his reign was Trier (306–316). In the period after his first war with Licinius, he then tended to repair to the Balkan cities of Sirmium and Serdica (317–324). Following his final victory over Licinius, he could most often be found residing in Nicomedia in Asia Minor (324–330). In the final seven years of his reign, Constantine mainly stayed in Constantinople. Constantine founded this new imperial city on 8 November 324, shortly after his definitive defeat of Licinius (he is said to have considered several candidates before that, including Chalcedon and Thessalonica).

Naturally, Constantinople was not built on an empty site. Back in *c.* 660 BCE, Greek colonists from Megara, led by the legendary Byzas, decided to found a city called Byzantium on a protrusion of the European mainland where the Bosphorus, the Golden Horn, and the Sea of Marmara converge. The city was excellently located and easy to defend (as Constantine himself discovered during his war with Licinius). Though not large, as it matured it gained two very good harbours, theatres, baths, and walls, and on its acropolis it had temples dedicated to Artemis, Aphrodite, and Apollo.⁸⁴ We encountered the city in its Latinised form, Byzantium, at the beginning of our narrative, when Septimius Severus was forced into a protracted siege at the dawn of his reign (as part of his war against Pescennius Niger). After capturing the city, he partially razed it, only to rebuild it much more magnanimously afterwards.⁸⁵

Constantine personally surveyed the new city and gave it dimensions roughly four times those of the old Byzantium.⁸⁶ With construction proceeding apace, by 326 a mint had been opened here.⁸⁷ On 11 May

⁸⁴ Basset, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*, 18–19.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Pohlsander (2004, 63), Barnes (2014, 111–113), however, argues that Byzantium was restored to its former architectural glory not by Septimius Severus, but by Licinius. Be that as it may, Severus built colonnaded streets, a forum, an agora, a basilica, the Baths of Zeuxippus and a hippodrome (although the last two structures remained unfinished, nor were the walls rebuilt); see Basset (2004, 19–21).

⁸⁶ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 121.

⁸⁷ Lo Cascio, “The emperor and his administration”, 181; Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 349.

330, a dedication ceremony was held⁸⁸ to name the city “New Rome” (*Nea Rōmē*), but this did not catch on and it was soon renamed the “City of Constantine”⁸⁹ (*Constantinopolis*).⁹⁰ Constantine also made sure to keep the city stocked: from 332 onwards, shipments of grain from Egypt were diverted on a scale more than sufficient to feed the population here at the time.⁹¹

The new city also got its own senate (actually an extended Byzantium city council).⁹² The members of the senate in Constantinople held the title *clari* and were ranked below the senate in Rome, whose members were *clarissimi*.⁹³ Around 337, the Roman senate numbered upwards of 600 members, while the Constantinople senate only had about 300 at this point, but it would not be long before Constantine’s son Constantius II increased the number of members of the senate in Constantinople to some 2,000.⁹⁴ The existence of two great imperial cities with their own senates invites comparison, and it is tempting to conclude that Constantinople was intended to be a substitute for or counterbalance to Rome. Politically, however, the two cities were punching at different weights: Constantine had a palace built for himself in Constantinople; after Maxentius, no emperor resided in Rome in the fourth century. Constantinople was founded as a replacement not for Rome, but for

⁸⁸ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 76 and 78.

⁸⁹ *Origo* 6, 30; Euseb. *VC* III, 48; Eutr. X, 8; Socr. *HE* I, 16.

⁹⁰ Sozomen (*HE* II, 3) observes that Constantine gave the city both names. One Greek epigram even mentions a prophecy which is said to have convinced Constantine not to found his “new Rome” on the site of Troy, but to choose Byzantium instead (see *The Greek Anthology V*, trans. by W. R. Paton, London – New York 1918, p. 85). Some sources also speak of a “second Rome”, see Optat. *Carm.* 4, 6 (*altera Roma*). Procopius of Caesarea, in his 6th-century historical work, stubbornly used the ancient name Byzantium for the city (only in his *Buildings* did he call it *Kōnstantinūpolis*, and even then only a few times).

⁹¹ Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 45; cf. Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation”, 362. Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* II, 13) provides us with an ambiguous account of the amount of imported grain, so while Jones (1964, 696) concludes that Constantine provided free bread for 80,000 inhabitants of Constantinople, Elton (2018, 60) counters that the figure was 80,000 households.

⁹² Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 266.

⁹³ *Origo* 30 (*ibi etiam senatum constituit secundi ordinis: claros vocavit*); Pohlsander (2004, 74).

⁹⁴ Stephenson, *Constantine*, 206.

Nicomedia, lying just 100 km east of Constantinople, at the easternmost tip of the Sea of Marmara, and within easy reach of the new city by boat. Why establish a new capital when there was already an imperial residence in the same area? Nicodemia's problem was that it was a frequent and favourite haunt of Diocletian, from whose religious policy Constantine was distancing himself.⁹⁵ By setting up a senate in his new city in the East, Constantine made sure that Constantinople was raised to a higher status than Nicomedia had ever enjoyed.⁹⁶

Barnes⁹⁷ argues that Constantinople was founded as a Christian city, but this is simply not true. In the first place, we must ask ourselves what is actually meant by a “Christian city”, especially in the context of the 4th-century Roman Empire. In Constantinople, Christians and pagans lived side by side, and the vast majority of buildings were religiously indifferent. It had no religious centre to speak of. To be sure, several Christian churches sprang up over time, but there were also numerous pagan temples.⁹⁸ None of these buildings occupied a prominent position. Not to mention the fact that anyone glancing at the way the city was decorated would have said it looked pagan: as the Christian author Jerome tells us, Constantinople was beautified at the cost of denuding just about every other city in the empire, as more than a hundred marble and bronze statues were relocated there on Constantine's orders.⁹⁹ Almost

⁹⁵ Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 268.

⁹⁶ That is not to say that Nicomedia lost its importance after the foundation of Constantinople. In fact, the city—present-day İzmit—remains significant to this day, with a population of 300,000.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Barnes (2014, 127) (“Constantine's new city was a Christian city, totally free of any trace of paganism until Julian introduced such rites into Constantinople in December 361”).

⁹⁸ In fact, the existing pagan temples were joined by new additions: one for the trinity of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, one for Tyche (Fortuna), and one for Rhea (Cybele)—see Basset (2004, 31), Harries (2012, 121–122), Lenski (2007b, 77). Of the Christian buildings, Constantine built only the Church of Holy Peace (Hagia Eirene), dedicated in 337 (Basset 2004, 26), and began constructing the Church of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia), which was not completed until the reign of Constantius II. The construction of a third major church, the Church of the Holy Apostles, was probably not begun until Constantius II (Cameron 2008, 101).

⁹⁹ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 330 (*dedicatur Constantinopolis omnium paene urbium nuditate*).

entirely from the East, these were statues of emperors, poets, philosophers, mythical creatures, demigods, and gods.¹⁰⁰ Naturally, the last thing on Constantine's mind in this regard was religion; instead, these efforts were very much related to traditional city planning, Roman urban culture, and ostentation. Besides their obvious aesthetic factor, the statues were put on display in various places around the city to show off the ruler's power, wealth, and prestige.¹⁰¹ Constantine's city was therefore either religiously neutral or "double-hearted".¹⁰² Indeed, at the Forum of Constantine in the middle of the city, the emperor had a column erected, atop of which he installed a statue of himself gazing eastwards, holding an orb in one hand, a spear in the other, and wearing a seven-point radiate crown. In other words, this statue bore a striking resemblance to *Sol Invictus*, the sun god encountered so many times among the emperors of the third century and whom Constantine himself had chosen as his special deity early on in his career!¹⁰³ Similarly, in the early 330 s, Constantine consented to the worship of his person and his family in a temple that the town of Hispellum in Umbria offered to build on its territory, his sole condition being that there were no blood sacrifices.¹⁰⁴

This brings us to a more general question: what was Constantine's attitude towards paganism after 324? Barnes has always argued that Constantine embarked on a highly aggressive policy against paganism after his victory over Licinius, which included a ban on pagan sacrifices and, to all intents and purposes, amounted to a religious revolution,

¹⁰⁰ Basset, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*, 37–39.

¹⁰¹ Constantine's Christian biographer felt compelled to interpret this measure as meaning that the emperor had these pagan statues exhibited in Constantinople "for ridicule and for the edification of onlookers", see Euseb. *VC* III, 54, 3.

¹⁰² Fowden (2008, 561), for example, observes that "In 337 Constantinople will have been as much a polytheist as a Christian city; and still it was more Christian than the rest of the empire."

¹⁰³ Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 77; Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, XX. The statue (mentioned by many Byzantine authors, e.g. Socr. *HE* I, 17) has not survived (it fell in 1106); it was probably naked. Philostorgius (*HE* II, 17) claims that sacrifices were made to it. The prevailing opinion is that it depicted Constantine in the form of a sun deity, whether Apollo, Helios, or *Sol Invictus* see, for example, Edwards (2007, 154), Pohlsander (2004, 70), Stephenson (2010, 201).

¹⁰⁴ Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363*, 163; Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 52; Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 281–282; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 23–34.

but most scholars are less forthright.¹⁰⁵ The problem is that this alleged prohibition of sacrifices to the gods is not directly attested in any contemporary law; the unreliable testimony of Eusebius and a few other vague allusions are all we have to go on.¹⁰⁶ We saw in Chapter 7, for example, that at some point in his reign—perhaps as late as 326—Constantine refused to perform pagan rites when visiting Rome. The case of the temple in Hispellum shows that the emperor clearly disapproved of sacrifices—especially blood sacrifices—but this personal stance was not necessarily reflected in legislation; even if it was, this still does not mean that the state authorities enforced and oversaw such a prohibition in practice.¹⁰⁷ After all, Constantine remained the supreme high priest (*pontifex maximus*) responsible for all religions in the empire, and most of his subjects—even those in the East—were still pagan.¹⁰⁸ The majority view is therefore that Constantine’s religious policy in the last 13 years of his reign was one of active support for Christianity and grudging tolerance of paganism.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, however unclear Constantine’s policy on paganism after 324, there can be no doubting the nature of his intervention in the internal affairs of the Christian church at this time.

¹⁰⁵ Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 210–212. In his most recent book, Barnes (2014, 13–16) backs up his argument by redating the creative period of a pagan poet named Palladas (whose work laments the decline of paganism) to the time of Constantine (see Chapter 2).

¹⁰⁶ Euseb. *VC* II, 45; IV, 23. Cf. Cameron (2008, 106–109). The emperor Constantius II’s 341 law (*CTh* XVI, 10, 2; see Pharr et al. 1952, 472), which forbids sacrifice, refers to an earlier law of Constantine (*legem divi principis parentis nostri*), now lost, that appears to have dealt with the same subject.

¹⁰⁷ Pohlsander (2004, 46) believes that a general prohibition existed, but was not practically enforced. Harries (2012, 164) also tends towards the view that at least some forms of sacrifice were forbidden by Constantine. Potter (2004, 433–434) agrees and makes this selective prohibition more specific: he argues that only sacrifices linked to divination and the imperial cult were prohibited. When all is said and done, if there was indeed a blanket prohibition against sacrifice, why would Constantine have reminded the people of Hispellum of it?

¹⁰⁸ The assessment of Constantine’s attitude towards paganism is also complicated by the fact that the Neoplatonic philosopher Sopater seems to have held a very prominent position at Constantine’s court at this time, at least for a while (Soz. *HE* I, 5; Zos. II, 40).

¹⁰⁹ This is how Odahl (2013, 188) puts it; a similar line is taken by Elton (2018, 52–53), Van Dam (2008, 31–33), Lee (2007b, 171–176), and Drake (2000, 245–250).

CONSTANTINE AS AN ECCLESIASTICAL POLITICIAN

As the *Origo* observes, Constantine did not receive the best of educations when he was growing up.¹¹⁰ Nor did he make up for it later. A whiff of contempt for education is mirrored in the *Oration of Constantine to the Assembly of the Saints*, in which the emperor says that no human education (as opposed to divine inspiration) ever helped him.¹¹¹ But even as far as Christian dogma is concerned, it could be argued that Constantine was and remained a dilettante in ecclesiastical doctrine, grasping no more than the basics of Christian teachings.¹¹² This is particularly apparent in his attempt to resolve the Arian controversy. On the other hand, Constantine had gained a wealth of experience from his previous dealings with bishops in the West on the matter of Donatism, and that would also play a role here.¹¹³

It is likely that news of the dispute that had arisen within the Christian community in Alexandria between the bishop Alexander and his subordinate priest Arius, evidently around 318,¹¹⁴ did not reach Constantine until after he had conquered the whole of the East in 324. The dispute turned on the question of the relationship between Father and Son in the divine trinity. Arius came up with a simple argument that was essentially logical and rational: that, since every father exists before his son, Jesus must have been created by his Father to mediate between him and the world, and that therefore “there was a time when Jesus was not”. Arius emphasised that this time was before all the creation of the world and time. This premise formed the basis of his further reasoning: the Son could not be equal in substance to the Father because the Father would suffer some kind of detriment by his creation—some diminution or division of his own substance. Alexander countered that Jesus is eternally

¹¹⁰ *Origo* 2, 2 (*litteris minus instructus*).

¹¹¹ *Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum* 11, 2.

¹¹² See Alföldi (1969, 20), Češka (2000, 64), Clauss (1996, XX). Odahl (2013, 128) takes the opposite view, arguing rather unconvincingly that, after 312, Constantine quickly acquired a Christian education based on his reading of the Bible and conversations with ecclesiastical leaders.

¹¹³ Drake (2007, 125) reminds us that Constantine took his cue from the Council of Rome in 313, presided over by the local bishop Miltiades, whose authority proved decisive in the matter under consideration (Donatism).

¹¹⁴ See Barnes (2014, 120), Odahl (2013, 190) (around 318); Potter (2004, 414 (318)); Pohlsander (2004, 49) (“some time after 312”).

existent, yet created from the Father, that he is equal in substance to his Father, yet subordinate to him, and that these are matters that cannot be rationally understood or explained.¹¹⁵

This was a hot topic of debate among bishops at their synods until the then ruler of the East, Licinius, forbade them from holding such gatherings.¹¹⁶ When Constantine took control of the whole of the Roman East, he found himself in a situation similar to that faced by Diocletian in 285: he was in command of a victorious army that had no rival, at least not within the empire. For the first time in 40 years, the entire empire was ruled by a single emperor. Moreover, Constantine was at the height of his power (whereas Diocletian's career had only just begun). Unlike Diocletian, who was not one to meddle in the internal affairs of individual religious communities, Constantine threw himself into the Arian controversy as though it were his own or the empire's problem.

His original plan was to reconcile the two main protagonists in the dispute. At the end of 324, he sent the bishop Ossius¹¹⁷ to both parties (Arius and Alexander) in Alexandria in order to deliver a letter, the text of which has been preserved for us by Eusebius of Caesarea.¹¹⁸ Here, the emperor says that the controversy centred on a dispute so unimportant and inconsequential that it should not have arisen in the first place. Aspiring to political unity in the empire and dogmatic unity in the church, he expressed his wish for the two antagonists to be reconciled. Viewed through the prism of theology, the letter is naive; from a political perspective, however, it is perfectly intelligible. The emperor had no interest in becoming embroiled in a theological debate; he expected the bishops to present a united front, and at this stage he did not care which side came out on top. Ossius of Córdoba was no mere messenger boy; he

¹¹⁵ Drake, "The Impact of Constantine on Christianity", 123. A more detailed discussion can be found in Williams (2002, 269–279).

¹¹⁶ Euseb. *VC* I, 51, 1; Barnes, *Constantine*, 120.

¹¹⁷ Češka (2000, 62) and Treadgold (1997, 42) give his name as Hosius; others (Barnes, Lenski, Drake, Potter, Stephenson, Odahl, Pohlsander, Girardet, and Bardill) call him Ossius. The name of this Hispanic bishop occurs as Hosius only among Greek sources (e.g. Socr. *HE* I, 7; Soz. *HE* I, 10) and may be a play on words (in Greek, *hosios* means "holy").

¹¹⁸ Euseb. *VC* II, 64–72.

was a long-time confidant of Constantine and an experienced adviser in all ecclesiastical matters.¹¹⁹ This mission, however, ended in failure.

On his return journey in the spring of 325, Ossius presided over a council of more than fifty bishops in Antioch, at which Eustathius, who had sided with Alexander in the Arian controversy, was elected as the new bishop of Antioch. His position appears to have been shared by most attendees, because this episcopal council decided to excommunicate Eusebius of Caesarea, the ecclesiastical historian and later biographer of Constantine, who was sympathetic to the teachings of Arius. Eusebius was guilty of refusing to sign a common statement of faith endorsing bishop Alexander's position and repudiating Arius' teachings. He was, however, given the opportunity to attend the Council of Nicaea to defend himself.¹²⁰

What makes the Council of Nicaea most interesting is not so much the theological aspect or the personal disputes among clerics in Alexandria or elsewhere, but imperial policy. Constantine, bent on personally overseeing a solution to the Arian controversy, sent letters of invitation to bishops throughout the empire, promising to pay their travel expenses. Originally, the council was to take place in Ankara (then Ancyra), in central Asia Minor, but Constantine changed his mind at the last minute and held it in Nicaea, in north-west Asia Minor. In the invitation he ordered be dispatched to bishops throughout the empire, he explained that he made this venue switch because of the better climate and also because Nicaea was easier for bishops in the West to reach. These two reasons are cogent enough in themselves, but they were not the only factors considered in the choice of location: Hal Drake believes that Constantine was advised to make the change by the bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. The bishop in Ankara, Marcellus, was known to hold very forthright views on Arius; in Nicaea, on the other hand, the bishop was Theognis, whose sympathies, as it later transpired, lay with the Arians. Eusebius of Nicomedia also sided with Arius in the controversy.¹²¹ However, it is doubtful whether Constantine could be swayed so easily by Eusebius at such an early stage. True, Eusebius had already been bishop of Nicomedia back in Licinius'

¹¹⁹ Perhaps starting in 312 (see Barnes 1981, 212).

¹²⁰ Drake, *Constantine, and the Bishops*, 250; Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 50.

¹²¹ Drake, *Constantine, and the Bishops*, 125.

time and exerted a certain influence over Licinius' wife, Constantine's sister Constantia. Bearing in mind that Constantine had chosen Nicomedia as his chief residence, Eusebius can be assumed to have shaped his thinking to some degree. And yet, as subsequent events played out, the anti-Arian bishop Ossius appears to have had Constantine's ear in early 325.¹²² David Potter, on the other hand, points out that Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, was ill-disposed towards Eusebius of Nicomedia and frowned upon his pretensions towards power; the conflict leading up to the Council of Nicaea can thus be viewed initially as Alexander's struggle for authority in Alexandria, but later it also becomes a test of strength between the bishops of Alexandria and Nicomedia.¹²³

The primary motive for holding the council in Nicaea, however, was evidently Constantine's determination, this time, to exercise complete control over what was happening, so he made sure that it was held within convenient commuting distance of his current imperial residence: from Nicomedia to Nicaea it is a 66 km canter, but to Ankara it is almost 350 km.¹²⁴ In fact, in his invitation to the bishops, the emperor noted that he himself would be present at the council "as an observer and participant". All the invitees must have known that the emperor's presence would hardly be conducive to a free-flowing exchange of views.

So it was that, in June 325, over 250 bishops are reported to have gathered at the state's expense in the beautiful lakeside setting of the imperial summer palace in Nicaea (the actual figure was more like 220; see below).¹²⁵ Although we have not been left any records of the council's proceedings, several accounts were drawn up, including one by the emperor's later biographer Eusebius of Caesarea, who met Constantine for the first time at this event. The council was probably presided over

¹²² Drake, *Constantine, and the Bishops*, 149.

¹²³ Potter, *Constantine, the Emperor*, 230.

¹²⁴ After vanquishing Licinius, Constantine settled in Nicomedia; he was there in February 325 (Barnes 1982, 76). Potter (2013, 233) also posits that the journey to Ankara would have been risky because of the dangers posed by supporters of the former regime, i.e. Licinius.

¹²⁵ This is the number cited in Euseb. *VC* III, 8 (later sources give numbers that are even slightly higher). The council is most often thought to have begun in early June 325 (Drake 2000, 252; Pohlsander 2004, 50–51; Odahl 2013, 196; Potter 2004, 418; Potter 2013, 234), but Češka (2000, 62) and Lenski (2007b, 80) say May.

by Ossius.¹²⁶ Constantine's sister Constantia, whose sympathies both now and later lay with the Arians, was also in attendance.¹²⁷ Arius' supporters were represented by Eusebius of Nicomedia, his opponents by Eustathius of Antioch and Alexander of Alexandria (the latter accompanied by his secretary Athanasius, who would later, as bishop of Alexandria, play a prominent role in the Arian controversy). A smattering of bishops from the Western regions and even from outside the empire gave the council the illusion of universality and worldliness, when in reality only the East was amply represented and the vast majority of participants spoke Greek.¹²⁸

A great many participants were clearly open-minded on the Arian controversy and came to the council ready to accept virtually any creed that would ensure harmony within the church.¹²⁹ The emperor delivered an opening address to the bishops, in which he impressed upon the bishops how keen he was to reach a universally acceptable solution to all their wrangling. Constantine's speech was given in Latin and simultaneously interpreted into Greek, though during the actual discussions he spoke to the various participants directly in Greek, and did so with great

¹²⁶ This is assumed by Barnes (1981, 215), Treadgold (1997, 42), and Potter (2004, 418). However, Eusebius' description here is so vague that the presiding bishop could just as easily have been the local bishop Theognis (Potter 2013, 234) or even Eusebius of Nicomedia (Drake 2000, 252).

¹²⁷ Pohlsander, "Constantia", 162.

¹²⁸ In point of fact, this council was ecumenical in name only; it was really more of a synod of bishops from Asia Minor, supported by a large contingent from the Levant and a number of delegates from Egypt and Libya. Europe was hardly represented at all. Modern authors have cited varying numbers of participants based on their interpretation of vague statements in our sources: around 300 (Claus 1996, 85; Odahl 2013, 196); 200–300 (Pohlsander 2004, 50); fewer than 250 (Cameron 2007, 98). Williams (2002, 67) concedes that there may have been only about 200 bishops (but believes that around 250 is most likely). We can take 220 as a reasonable estimate, with half comprising bishops from Asia Minor, a quarter from Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia, and the rest from Egypt, Libya, and the Balkans. Gaul, Africa, and Italy sent just one bishop each (see Pohlsander 2004, 50; Edwards 2006, 558); the bishop of Rome, Sylvester, pleaded old age and sent two legates in his place. No one came from Hispania (Ossius does not count because he was not a delegate but an adviser to the emperor) or Britain. Latin was the mother tongue of perhaps fewer than ten of the bishops in attendance. To put it frankly, the more distant the bishopric, the less likely its bishop was to show up at the council. The council was organised hastily (Constantine was obviously in a hurry to resolve the Arian controversy) and journeying all the way across the empire would have been a slog.

¹²⁹ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 215.

grace and flattery.¹³⁰ Then Eusebius of Caesarea, who was there to defend himself, delivered his carefully prepared creed, in which he avoided any wording that might prove controversial and be used by his opponents to excoriate him. Constantine himself praised Eusebius, declaring that his own thinking was along almost exactly the same lines. Could Eusebius just add to his creed the tiny detail that Jesus and the Father are of the same substance (*homoousios*)? Eusebius, reluctantly, relented, leaving his opponents no choice but to rescind his excommunication.¹³¹

Negotiations dragged on for many days—after all, there were other items on the agenda, such as the calculation of when Easter should be celebrated—but finally, on 19 June, the council accepted the creed, prepared by Ossius, that God exists in three distinct persons completely equal in substance. It also denounced the claim that “there was a time when Jesus was not”. Although the term *homoousios* is not found in the Bible, and very soon proved to be highly controversial, it had to suffice for the moment because the emperor had insisted on unity; only two bishops from Libya disagreed with the creed and were sent into exile (as was Arius, needless to say). Theognis of Nicaea and Eusebius of Nicomedia signed the joint declaration, but protested against the exile of the two dissenting bishops. When the council was over, Constantine invited the bishops to Nicomedia to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his reign (his *vicennalia*), which fell on 25 July. On the day after, he made a speech to them again exhorting their unity and then dismissed them. As Noel Lenski poetically puts it, “Constantine probably assumed that he had stamped out the fires of controversy. Instead, he had merely scattered its sparks across the empire, where they would flare up for the rest of the century.”¹³²

Indeed, soon after the Council of Nicaea it became clear that the unity supposedly achieved here had been wishful thinking. After it came to light that Theognis of Nicaea and Eusebius of Nicomedia were in contact with Ares and his followers, the emperor stripped them of office and sent them into exile just three months after the council.¹³³ At the end of

¹³⁰ Euseb. *VC* III, 13, 1–2; Potter (2013, 234).

¹³¹ Socr. *HE* I, 8, 3. The emperor, of course, had not thought up this word on the spur of the moment in a fit of sudden enlightenment; he had meticulously prepared everything beforehand, and it is quite likely that either Ossius or Alexander had advised him of this dubious term. See Barnes (2014, 121).

¹³² Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 80.

¹³³ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 52.

327, the exiled Arius decided to seek the emperor's forgiveness and an opportunity to defend himself before him. The emperor gladly agreed, assuming that this would lead to complete and total unanimity of faith. In November, Arius presented himself at the imperial court and delivered his creed (which, though lacking the term *homoousios*, was otherwise in keeping with the Nicene Creed). After speaking to Arius in person, the emperor was completely satisfied with what he had been told and sent a request to Alexander in Alexandria to take Arius back. Alexander refused. Nevertheless, a council convened at Nicomedia in December 327 revoked Arius' excommunication.¹³⁴ Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis saw their opportunity and, in the first half of 328, also successfully petitioned the emperor to revoke their exile. Eusebius resumed his important bishopric in Constantine's (temporary) capital and even replaced Ossius (who had returned to his native Hispania not long after the Council of Nicaea) as the emperor's unofficial adviser on ecclesiastical affairs.¹³⁵ Eusebius immediately began flexing his influence at court to depose his opponents—as early as 328, he succeeded in ousting Eustathius of Antioch and bringing that key bishopric under Arian control.¹³⁶ And so began a war of bishops—a veritable game of chess¹³⁷—over whether the important bishoprics in the East would be Arian or Nicene. Constantine, still believing that unity could be achieved, unwittingly encouraged this war by making erratic interventions in ecclesiastical policy.

Meanwhile, in April 328, Bishop Alexander died in Alexandria and was succeeded by Athanasius, who promoted the Nicene Creed even more tenaciously than his predecessor. In this struggle, Athanasius unquestionably attracted most attention because his intransigence and complete unwillingness to compromise in any way brought him into direct conflict with Constantine. At the turn of 332, Athanasius had

¹³⁴ Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 229.

¹³⁵ Barnes (1981, 384, note 10) puts forward the intriguing hypothesis that Ossius, disgusted at the execution of Crispus, left Constantine's court while the emperor was in Italy in 326.

¹³⁶ Drake, *Constantine, and the Bishops*, 260–261. According to Barnes (1981, 226; 2001, 17), this happened earlier, at the Council of Antioch in 327, and Eustathius' fall was actually instigated by Eusebius of Caesarea.

¹³⁷ Except, of course, that every piece in this game was a bishop (with Constantine as king looking on, occasionally interfering, and gradually changing his colours).

to lodge a defence—before the emperor himself—against multiple accusations (including violence and corruption) that had been made by his enemies. Constantine acquitted him on all counts, and Athanasius returned to Alexandria in triumph. He faced charges (now including murder) a second time in 334. Although he refused to appear at the Council of Caesarea, where his case was to be heard, the emperor again acquitted him on the basis of what his investigators had discovered in Egypt. Shortly afterwards, new accusations surfaced, which Constantine ordered to be investigated at the Council of Tyre in Phoenicia in 335. On this occasion, the council confirmed Arius’ rehabilitation in full. This time, Athanasius was indeed convicted of some of his crimes and removed from office, but he secretly fled Tyre, reappearing in Constantinople two months later, on 30 October. Constantine was not in the city at the time, but returned on 6 November. He was riding along the street on horseback when he crossed paths with Athanasius, whom he failed to recognise at first because of his very plain garb. Athanasius grabbed the halter of the emperor’s horse in front of the astonished crowd and begged for a chance to defend himself against his adversaries in Constantine’s presence. Consenting to this request, the emperor wrote to the bishops at Tyre telling them they must come to Constantinople to prove the impartiality of their judgment. This *de facto* nullified the council’s judicial finding. In Tyre, meanwhile, six bishops—among them Athanasius’ old enemies Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Theognis of Nicaea—had guessed where Athanasius was headed. They reached Constantinople just in time to confront Athanasius with a new accusation, alleging that he had threatened to cut off Constantinople’s grain supply from Egypt.¹³⁸ And that is when Athanasius made a mistake: he warned the emperor that God would ultimately decide between the two of them. This provoked Constantine, in the Great Palace of Constantinople on 6 November 335, into banishing Athanasius to Trier, where he remained until June 337. Yet even as an exile he did not cease to be the bishop of Alexandria; although the Council of Tyre had deposed him, the emperor, as we know, annulled this decision and gave no further instructions in this respect. Constantine gave legal force to the decisions taken by ecclesiastical councils, but he also claimed the authority to convene these councils and to set their agenda; furthermore, he tacitly reserved the right to annul any

¹³⁸ Barnes, *Athanasius, and Constantius*, 23–24; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 239–240; Drake, “The Impact of Constantine on Christianity”, 148.

council's decision that was not to his liking.¹³⁹ Constantine had always been a politician; from 325 onwards, he also assumed the position of a kind of super-bishop, the supreme authority in both secular and ecclesiastical matters. He was once at a banquet where he said to the bishops, "You are the bishops of those within the church; but I may be the bishop ordained by God for those outside the church."¹⁴⁰

Potter is absolutely right when he says that, in a way, Arius adhered to the spirit of the Council of Nicaea more than Athanasius, in that he was prepared to compromise, but Athanasius was not.¹⁴¹ Arius, however, never made it back to Egypt; he died in Constantinople in 336. Athanasius, on the other hand, still had an illustrious career ahead of him. He died in 373, still as bishop of Alexandria. At the Council of Nicaea, as Hal Drake puts it, Constantine was in his prime as a politician. In 326–337, however, he vacillated in ecclesiastical matters, changing his mind repeatedly and unable to commit to a decision. He allowed himself to be drawn into the war of the bishops and was influenced by powerful figures such as Ossius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Athanasius. Although the Nicene Creed was never revoked, in the last years of his life Constantine acted as if it had been. Right before he died, he was baptised by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who became bishop of Constantinople in 338. After Constantine's death, Arianism triumphed in the East.¹⁴²

WAR WITH THE GOTHs

In the chapter on Licinius, we discussed Constantine's wars with the Goths and the Sarmatians in 323. Even back then, Constantine had made it clear to these two great Danubian nations that he was prepared to pursue a much more active policy on the Danube than had hitherto been the case, and, if he thought it necessary, to make an incursion across the river. Once he had defeated Licinius and consolidated his position in the East, Constantine turned his attention back to the Danube frontier. In 328, he opened a newly built stone bridge across the Danube, a marvel

¹³⁹ Barnes, *Athanasius, and Constantius*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Euseb. *VC* IV, 24.

¹⁴¹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 422.

¹⁴² Drake, "The Impact of Constantine on Christianity", 130; Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 258.

of Roman engineering connecting the Roman city of Oescus (present-day Gigen, Bulgaria) with Sucidava (present-day Celeiu, Romania).¹⁴³ It was at this time that he also had the fortress of Daphne built in barbarian territory further downstream on the left bank of the Danube.¹⁴⁴ In 332, he struck the Danube Goths hard, supposedly in aid of the Sarmatians who were being severely oppressed by the Goths. Two years later, he launched a similar attack against the Sarmatians, moving many of them into Roman territory (this campaign is discussed below).¹⁴⁵

These two campaigns across the Danube are noted in many of our sources, but mostly only in passing; they are almost always interpreted as great victories for Constantine, and an emphasis is placed on the fact that these battles took place in barbarian territory.¹⁴⁶ A few sources provide us with details. For example, we know the date of the Gothic defeat: the Goths were defeated on 20 April 332 in Sarmatian territory, probably in the area of the River Tisza in present-day eastern Hungary.¹⁴⁷ According to the *Origo*, Constantine had decided to accept an appeal for help from the Sarmatians. Waging the war via his son Constantine II, he dealt a heavy blow to the Goths, with nearly 100,000 of them said to

¹⁴³ Aur. Vict. 41, 18 (*pons per Danubium ductus; castra castellaque pluribus locis commode posita*); *Epitome* 41, 13 (*pontem in Danubio construxit*).

¹⁴⁴ Amm. Marc. XXVII, 5, 2. For the location of this fortress, see den Boeft et al. 2009, 107–108).

¹⁴⁵ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 256. Cameron (2008, 105), Potter (2013, 285), Barnes (2014, 165), and Pohlsander (2004, 78) discuss the war with the Goths, but ignore the Sarmatian displacement. Jones (1972, 194–195) erroneously dates the war with the Goths to 331; he treats it as the repulse of a Gothic invasion of Roman territory, but this campaign seems to have taken place entirely in barbarian territory across the Danube.

¹⁴⁶ Aur. Vict. 41, 13 (*Et interea Gothorum Sarmatarumque stratae gentes, filiusque cunctorum minor, Constans nomine, Caesar fit*); Eutr. X, 7 (*Nam etiam Gothos post civile bellum varie profligavit, pace iis postremum data, ingentemque apud barbaras gentes memoriae gratiam conlocavit*); Euseb. VC IV, 6; Rufinus, HE X, 8 (*Interea Constantinus, pietate fretus, Sarmatas, Gothos, aliasque barbaras nationes, nisi quae vel amicitii vel deditione sui pacem praevererant, in solo proprio armis edomuit*); Oros. Hist. VII, 28 (*Praeterea multas gentes diversis praeliis subegit [...] Mox Gothorum fortissimas et copiosissimas gentes in ipso barbarici soli sinu, hoc est in Sarmatarum regione, delevit*); Socr. HE I, 18; Soz. HE I, 8, 8; II, 34, 4. Sources with a different perspective: Zos. II, 31, 2; Jord. *Get.* 111–112.

¹⁴⁷ *Cons. Const.* s. a. 332 (*Pacatiano et Hilariano. His consulibus victi Gothi ab exercitu Romano in terris Sarmatarum die XII k. Mai*; quoted according to Burgess (1993a, 236); Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 332 (*Romani Gothos in Sarmatarum regione vicerunt*).

have perished from hunger and cold. He then took hostages, including the son of the Gothic king Ariaric, and made peace with the Goths.¹⁴⁸ Although the *Origo* is generally considered to be a reliable and accurate source, it clearly presents us with several problems in this particular case. Constantine the Younger, at the age of 15, could hardly have been given command of an army.¹⁴⁹ It would be more rational to assume either that Constantine entrusted such command—and the protection of his son—to his generals and merely observed the campaign from Marcianopolis,¹⁵⁰ or that he took charge of the operations himself and, for propaganda purposes, subsequently advertised the outcome of the conflict as a victory for his son. This would tally with the fact that he himself triumphed over the Sarmatians two years later (none of his sons is named by our sources). The second problem concerns the timing. It is hard to imagine the Goths dying of frost at the end of April. The phrase *fame et frigore* (“hunger and cold”) may be nothing more than alliteration, or perhaps the author of the *Origo* simply did not know when the battle took place.

Events probably unfolded like this: in late March or early April, having scrupulously planned the operation, Constantine suddenly dispatched his mobile army of tens of thousands of soldiers across the bridge at Oescus and into Gothic territory, where they proceeded in a north-westerly direction. At the time, the main body of Gothic warriors and their king, Ariaric, were in Sarmatian territory.¹⁵¹ This meant that the Romans encountered little resistance and quickly swept through Gothic territory, pillaging it on the way by emptying grain stores, driving off cattle, and burning down villages. This made supplying the Roman army that much easier, but spelt

¹⁴⁸ *Origo* 6, 30–31 (*Deinde adversum Gothos bellum suscepit et implorantibus Sarmatis auxilium tulit. Ita per Constantinum Caesarem centum prope milia fame et frigore extincta sunt. Tunc et obsides accepit inter quos Ariarici regis filium.*).

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion on his date of birth (7 August 316), see Chapter 8.

¹⁵⁰ This is the view espoused by Lenski (2016, 43): “Constantine left combat operations to Constantine II while he himself followed the war from the frontier city of Marcianopolis”. In any event, Constantine is attested in Marcianopolis on 12 April (*CTH* III, 5, 4; Barnes 1982, 79), and he may have remained in that city for the entire war with the Goths.

¹⁵¹ We can only speculate as to what the Goths were doing in Sarmatian territory. They may have been attempting to expand their tribal territory in this direction (as posited by Stephenson 2010, 225), or perhaps they had plundered it and were subsequently wintering in enemy territory (which was actually quite far from the heart of Gothic territory; see Wolfram 1990, 61; Odahl 2013, 253).

disaster for the Goths. As planned, the Romans allied themselves with the Sarmatians and encircled the Goths. When their provisions ran out, the Goths began to suffer from hunger and perhaps even cold (if it was an unusually bleak spring). In a desperate attempt to save themselves, they took the battle to the Romans, but were defeated on 20 April. Thousands may have fallen in the actual fighting, with further tens of thousands probably dying later from starvation. King Ariaric was forced to surrender and give up his son and many noble Goths as hostages. In addition, it seems likely that the Goths were forced to pay an annual tribute to the Romans, and that they made the commitment to supply auxiliary troops on demand.¹⁵² Whatever was covered by the treaty, it proved effective: the Romans would not subsequently clash with the Goths in open warfare until 367.

Constantine then returned to Constantinople and evidently spent the rest of the year here.¹⁵³ To commemorate his defeat of the Goths, he had a victory column with an inscription celebrating his triumph¹⁵⁴ erected in the city and instituted “Gothic games” (*ludi Gothici*) in honour of the event.¹⁵⁵ Medallions worth 1.5 *solidi*, inscribed “for the conquerors of the barbarian tribes” (*debellatori gentium barbarum*) and *Gothia* (i.e. Gothic territory north of the Lower Danube), were issued, as were *solidi* with the same inscriptions and a depiction of a captive kneeling between the emperor and a Roman soldier. Two types of medallions worth 3 and 2 *solidi*, portraying a young prince (probably Constantine II) and inscribed *principia iuventutis* and *Sarmatia*, were also struck.¹⁵⁶ All these coins come from 332 and 333 and appear to be referring to the Roman victory over the Goths in the land of the Sarmatians.

¹⁵² The best discussion on this treaty of alliance can be found in Lenski (2002, 122–127). Clauss (1996, 52), inspired by Jordanes’ testimony (Get. 111–112), has even argued that, on this occasion, the Goths must also have supplied 40,000 warriors for Constantine to station on Roman territory. However, as Jordanes was viewing the treaty through the anachronistic lens of the sixth century, this claim lacks credence. Kulikowski (2007b, 85–86), too, observes that this was “an anachronistic Byzantine interpretation”.

¹⁵³ His presence there is documented on 17 October (Barnes 1982, 79).

¹⁵⁴ ILS 820 (*Fortunae reduci ob devictos Gothos*).

¹⁵⁵ Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, 62.

¹⁵⁶ Bruun, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume VII*, 215–216 (Trier 531–534).

WAR WITH THE SARMATIANS

The Roman victory over the Sarmatians in 334 was not celebrated on coins nearly as much,¹⁵⁷ even though it was undoubtedly a great achievement. The account in one source drily observes: “During the consulship of Optatus and Paulinus, the whole nation of Sarmatian slaves drove their masters into Roman territory.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, infighting among the Sarmatians resulted in the losing side seeking asylum with the Romans. Another source tells us that the victors were known as the Limigantes and the losers were the Argaragantes.¹⁵⁹ The *Origo* reports that “after making peace with the Goths, Constantine turned against the Sarmatians, who had proven unreliable. However, the slaves of the Sarmatians rose up against their masters and expelled them. Constantine gladly took them in, and dispersed more than 300,000 people of different ages and both sexes across the territories of Thrace, Scythia, Macedonia, and Italy”.¹⁶⁰

This account raises certain questions. In what sense was the Sarmatians’ allegiance to the Romans unsound, and how is this linked to the revolt of their slaves? Was Constantine planning a punitive expedition against the Argaragantes that, as a result of an uprising, turned into a rescue mission? When Aurelius Victor mentions the defeat of the Sarmatians, he may be referring to Constantine’s success in Sarmatia in general, or to Constantine’s victory over the Limigantes, which saved the Argaragantes from total annihilation. Perhaps we are overcomplicating matters. Unlike the Gothic campaign, there is no reason to assume that Constantine’s army was in barbarian territory at all. Constantine might indeed

¹⁵⁷ There is perhaps a vague reference to this on coins struck in Siscia or elsewhere in 334, which bear the inscriptions *Victoria Constantini Avg.* and *Victor omnium gentium*, though these do not specifically identify the Sarmatians in any way. See Bruun (1966, 413); Stephenson (2010, 227).

¹⁵⁸ *Cons. Const. s. a. 334 (Optato et Paulino. His consulibus Sarmatae servi universa gens dominos suos in Romaniam expulerunt;* quoted according to Burgess 1993a, 236).

¹⁵⁹ Hieron. *Chron. s. a. 334 (Sarmatae Limigantes, dominos suos, qui nunc Argaragantes vocantur, facta manu, in Romanum solum expulerunt)*. Ammianus Marcellinus confirms the names of the victors (XVII, 13, 1: *Limigantes, Sarmatas servos*). No other source mentions the losers. In the manuscripts of Jerome’s *Chronicle*, they also occur in the variants *Arcaragantes* and *Ardaragantes*.

¹⁶⁰ *Origo* 6, 32 (*Sic cum his pace firmata in Sarmatas versus est, qui dubiae fidei probabantur. Sed servi Sarmatarum adversum omnes dominos rebellarunt, quos pulsos Constantinus libenter accepit et amplius trecenta milia hominum mixtae aetatis et sexus per Thraciam, Scythiam, Macedoniam, Italiamque divisit.*).

have once more swept through Gothic territory (perhaps some sort of Roman protectorate by then), striking at the Limigantes and giving the Argaragantes free passage into Roman territory, but such a great victory would have been memorialised in much the same way as that over the Goths. Greater passivity on the part of the Romans is a more likely scenario. Constantine is attested in Constantinople on 17 June, then in Singidunum on 5 July, Viminacium on 4 August, and Naissus on 25 August.¹⁶¹ In other words, he moved very quickly from Constantinople to Singidunum, where he remained for about a month, before proceeding at a more leisurely pace to Viminacium and then Naissus. His subsequent movements are unknown; he may have stayed in Naissus, or perhaps he returned to Constantinople (where he is attested in early 335). It looks like Constantine did not leave Roman territory at all, and that during July and August he never went further than Danubian cities as he oversaw the logistics involved in taking in, supplying, and distributing tens of thousands of Sarmatian immigrants. The areas in which the immigrants were settled, as described by the *Origo*, form a kind of crescent around Singidunum: the province of *Scythia Minor* furthest east, *Thracia* to the south-east, *Macedonia* to the south, and Italy to the south-west. Constantine seems to have been trying to shepherd the refugees to areas that lay as far away as possible from Upper Moesia and Pannonia, through which the throngs of Sarmatians passed. Whatever form the relocation of immigrants took, it must have been one of the most challenging logistical operations ever undertaken by the empire. We saw in Chapter 3 that there had been transfers on a similar scale before; a figure of 300,000 is usually accepted without argument.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ *CTh* I, 22, 2 (17 June); *CTh* X, 15, 2 (5 July); *CTh* XII, 1, 21 (4 August); *CTh* XI, 39, 3 (25 August). See also Barnes (1982, 79) and Stephenson (2010, 227).

¹⁶² Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 256; Barnes, *Constantine, and Eusebius*, 250; Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 200. Doubts have been raised by König (1987, 14), who argues that, if the figure really was so high, Constantine would have had to encounter greater resistance from the Sarmatians who were being displaced (“da man so mit ca. 50 bis 60.000 Wehrfähigen zu rechnen hätte”). However, there was no need for Constantine to fight the Sarmatians; if they were indeed capitulants (*dediticii*), they would have been prepared to accept the terms of settlement in Roman territory, including fragmentation into many groups, and may have been grateful for asylum with the Romans. For more on this episode (and on considerations related to the settlement of the Sarmatians), see Doležal (2019a, 231–257).

It remains to consider how much influence the Romans wielded in the area settled by the Goths north of the Lower Danube (*Gothia*) in the wake of Constantine's campaigns described above. Eusebius says that Constantine annexed the whole of Scythia—as opposed to just “Lesser Scythia” (i.e. the aforementioned province of *Scythia Minor*)—meaning here the barbarian territory in general beyond the Danube.¹⁶³ That is, to be sure, a statement worthy of a panegyric, but the fact of the matter is that Constantine conferred on himself the title *Gothicus maximus* (for the second time) in 332, *Sarmaticus maximus* (also for the second time) in 334, and *Dacicus maximus* in 335 or 336.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, the “Sarmatian Games” (*ludi Sarmatici*), which had probably been introduced straight after Constantine's victory over the Sarmatians in 323, were extended to a week (from 25 November to 1 December).¹⁶⁵ This has led many scholars to assume at least the partial and temporary Roman annexation of the former Roman Dacia (mostly without any indication of when these conquests were again abandoned).¹⁶⁶ Our sources would surely not have been silent on such a major achievement. There are only two clues, and flimsy ones at that, prodding us along this line of reasoning. The emperor Julian summed up the successes of his emperor uncle against the barbarians by noting that Constantine had regained possession of those areas conquered by Trajan; then there is Festus, who, against the backdrop of Constantine's preparations for the Persian campaign in 337, goes no further than mentioning his “recent victory over the Goths” (*recenti de Gothis victoria*).¹⁶⁷ The *Origo*, however, tells us that the *caesar* Dalmatius

¹⁶³ Euseb. *VC* I, 8, 2.

¹⁶⁴ See Barnes (1976, 149–155), Barnes (1982, 258), Barnes (2014, 165).

¹⁶⁵ Wienand, *Der Kaiser als Sieger*, 336; Salzman, *On Roman Time*, 138.

¹⁶⁶ Barnes (1981, 250) contends that there was “at least a partial reconquest of the Dacia”. Cf. Barnes (1982, 80), Barnes (2014, 165–166), Cameron (2008, 105) (“some renewal of Roman control in Dacia”); Pohlsander 2004, 78 (“the partial and temporary recovery of Dacia”). Similar conclusions are reached by Potter (2013, 285), Elliott (1996, 255), and Odahl (2013, 261). Kulikowski (2007a, 102) and Lenski (2002, 122) are more cautious, suggesting that, at most, fortresses were built and camps were set up on the barbarian side of the Danube; Wilkes (2005, 161) speculates that a Roman protectorate was established in Dacia to prevent other barbarian groups from infiltrating the territory of Roman allies.

¹⁶⁷ Julianus, *Caesares* 329c; Festus 26.

was charged by Constantine with protecting the banks of the Danube—presumably both the Roman and the barbarian ones.¹⁶⁸ His residence became Naissus (probably from 335¹⁶⁹), and his duties may have included not only securing the border, but also overseeing the transfer and distribution of Sarmatian refugees and supplying them with provisions since, presumably, the whole process cannot have been completed in 334 (as we can gather from the migration crisis in Europe which peaked in 2015, but also spilled into 2016, when further large numbers of immigrants arrived). In around 338, Roman commanders appear to have found themselves fighting the barbarians on the Danube border again, specifically in the province of *Scythia Minor*.¹⁷⁰ Literary sources have little to say about the Danube frontier in the post-Constantine period, but that was precisely because the prevailing peace, at least with the Goths, meant that there was nothing to report. Ammianus Marcellinus noted that, in 362, the emperor Julian refused to heed his friends' calls “to attack the nearby Goths, who had often shown themselves to be treacherous and full of guile”. Julian, who was then preparing for his Persian campaign, jokingly replied that slave traders were all that was needed to deal with the Goths (presumably in reference to the internal wars in Gothia, which yielded prisoners of war that the Romans were interested in buying). Nevertheless, there were sporadic clashes on the Danube frontier, which Julian took care to secure firmly.¹⁷¹ Whatever Constantine or his generals had gained across the Danube in the 330s was evidently lost long before 362.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *Origo* 6, 35 (*ripam Gothicam tuebatur*). See Chrysos (2001, 69–72).

¹⁶⁹ However, he is not attested there until 337 (see Barnes 1982, 87; Odahl 2013, 264).

¹⁷⁰ Sappo, *dux limitis Scythiae*, is known by name, as he is recorded on an inscription near Troesmis (*ILS* I, 724 = *CIL* III, 12,483); Barnes (2001, 224–225), cf. *PLRE* I, 803.

¹⁷¹ Amm. Marc. XXII, 7, 8 (*suadentibus proximis, ut adgrederetur propinquos Gothos saepe fallaces et perfidos, hostes quaerere se meliores aiebat: illis enim sufficere mercatores Galatas, per quos ubique sine condicionis discrimine venundantur*); XXII, 7, 7 (*quos per supercilia Histri dispersos, excursibusque barbarorum oppositos agere vigilanter audiebat et fortiter*).

¹⁷² For a general overview of Gothic-Roman relations during the Constantinian dynasty, see Heather (1991, 107–121), Kulikowski (2007a, 100–106). For an outline of events on the Danube frontier at this time, see Wilkes (2008, 231–233).

ULFILAS

One of the consequences of making peace with the Goths in 332 was that there was greater interaction between the empire and Gothia, as tellingly attested by archaeological finds in present-day Romania (especially in the vicinity of the Danube), such as Roman glass, amphorae, other pottery, tools, and metal artefacts, including jewellery; the coins found here reliably establish the period from the 320 s to the 360 s as the time when mutual trade on the Roman-Gothic frontier was at its busiest.¹⁷³ This Roman-Gothic contact went well beyond the merely diplomatic or commercial; it also involved the spread of Christianity. The most influential figure in the Christianisation of 4th-century Gothia was the bishop Ulfilas. Although his name is Gothic,¹⁷⁴ he was a descendant of Christian Roman captives taken from Roman territory by the Goths during their invasions in the third century. The extant fragments of Philostorgius' *Church History*—one of our main sources—even tell us the name of the village where Ulfilas' ancestors were from.¹⁷⁵ We also have a biographical and memoir-like letter, entitled *Epistula de fide, vita et obitu Ulfilae* ("On the Faith, Life, and Death of Ulfilas"), written by Ulfilas' pupil and follower Auxentius, bishop of the Danubian town of Durostorum (present-day Silistra, Bulgaria). This is another work that has not survived directly, but was used in the 440 s by the Arian bishop Maximinus when he was composing his *Dissertatio contra Ambrosium*, which has been preserved in a single copy.¹⁷⁶ Most of the information

¹⁷³ Lenski, *The Failure of Empire*, 118.

¹⁷⁴ The name Ulfilas is undoubtedly a diminutive of the Gothic word *wulfs*, or "wolf" (i.e. *wulfila* = "little wolf"). See Schönfeld (1911, 271–272) (s.v. "Vulfila"); Orel (2003, 473) (s.v. "wulfaz"). Our sources variously call him Ulfila (Auxentius), Úrfilas (Philostorgius), Úlfilas (Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret), and Vulfila (Jordanes).

¹⁷⁵ Philostorgius (*HE* II, 5) says they hailed from Sadagolthina, a village near the town of Parnassos (in the middle of present-day Turkey) in Cappadocia. The invasion took place during the joint reign of Valerian and Gallienus (253–260). For an English translation of and commentary on Philostorgius' *Church History*, see Heather and Matthews (1991, 134–135), Philostorgius, *Church History. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Philip R. Amidon, S. J.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 20–22.

¹⁷⁶ For a translation of and commentary on Auxentius' letter, see Heather and Matthews (1991, 135–143). For the original, see, for example, Georg Waitz, ed., *Über das Leben und die Lehre des Ulfila* (Hannover: Hahn, 1840); Wilhelm Streitberg, ed., *Die gotische Bibel, Teil 1* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1908), pp. xiv–xviii.

known to us about Ulfilas' life is drawn from these two heretical documents; certain details can also be gleaned from the texts of orthodox church historians.¹⁷⁷

Ulfilas' captured ancestors (great-grandparents?) were therefore Roman Christians from Cappadocia who probably spoke Greek. They and other captured Romans continued to spread their faith in their new Gothic setting. Ulfilas' parents are likely to have spoken Gothic and had Gothic names; they would have been no different from the other inhabitants of Gothia, except for their knowledge of their ancestral mother tongue (Greek) and an awareness of where they came from (otherwise Philostorgius would not have had that precise information). According to Auxentius, Ulfilas himself, born in the early fourth century (for a more precise date, see below), knew Gothic, Greek, and Latin, although Auxentius notes this only in his general summary of Ulfilas' episcopal activity, and specifically says that Ulfilas preached in these three languages (*greecam et latinam et goticam linguam [...] predicavit*), which may mean that he did not grow up with a sound knowledge of all these languages, but learnt them over the course of his life. Be that as it may, Ulfilas is said to have left many treatises and commentaries in Greek, Latin, and Gothic (*ipsis tribus linguis plures tractatus et multos interpretationes*); he is best known for translating the Bible into Gothic.

Philostorgius reports that, during the reign of Constantine, the ruler of Gothia dispatched Ulfilas and others on a diplomatic mission to the imperial court, probably in Constantinople. He adds the detail that the barbarian tribes governed by this ruler were subject to the emperor at the time, indicating that the event occurred not long after 332. Philostorgius also mentions that, on the occasion of this mission, Ulfilas was ordained bishop of the Christians in the land of the Goths by Eusebius and "the bishops who were with Eusebius". This Eusebius is the bishop of Nicomedia, who later (in 338) became patriarch of Constantinople, a circumstance some scholars consider a problem because they assume that Eusebius would have had the authority to elevate Ulfilas to the bishopric only after he had been made archbishop. This reasoning rules out the possibility that such an act could have taken place during the lifetime of Constantine, who died in 337. Philostorgius' text is thus sometimes thought of as flawed in the sense that it is actually referring not

¹⁷⁷ Socr. *HE* II, 41; Soz. *HE* VI, 37; Theod. *HE* IV, 33; Jord. *Get.* 267.

to Constantine, but to his son and successor in the East, Constantius II (which could be corrected in the text by changing *Kónstantinú* to *Kónstantiú*). Others look for a council that would have enabled Eusebius and the assembled bishops over whom he presided to consecrate Ulfilas (they usually land on the Council of Antioch in 341, as Eusebius died shortly after). However, Ulfilas did not need a council to make him a bishop. The presence of Eusebius and a few other bishops at the emperor's court, and above all the will of the monarch himself, would have been enough. Not to mention the fact that otherwise we would be forced into the conclusion that the ruler of Gothia must have sent his delegation to the emperor specifically in order to attend the council (the proceedings of which were none of the business of the Gothic envoys), or that Ulfilas had been on Roman territory twice—first on a diplomatic mission to Constantine and then for the council at which he was ordained bishop. However, to accept this would be to cast doubt on Philostorgius' testimony and side with Auxentius.

According to Auxentius' account, Ulfilas became a bishop at the age of 30; for the next 7 years, he is said to have served in Gothia, followed by 33 years in Moesia, where he and many other Gothic Christians had been forced to flee from the persecution unleashed by the "impious and sacrilegious ruler of the Goths" (*ab inreligioso et sacrilego indice Gothorum*). When Ulfilas had been bishop for 40 years, the emperor commanded him to come to Constantinople to attend a council, during the proceedings of which he died. The persecution of Christians in Gothia, prompting Ulfilas to leave for the Roman Empire, is dated to 347–348,¹⁷⁸ and we know for sure that Eusebius died in 341. The second ecumenical council (381) has been suggested as the event at which Ulfilas died; if so, Ulfilas and his followers arrived in the empire in 348 and he would have been ordained in 341. Alternatively, we can shrug off or modify Auxentius' dates (which even Auxentius himself likens to significant dates in the lives of the biblical David, Joseph, and Jesus) and trust the testimony of Philostorgius instead.¹⁷⁹ And yet simply dismissing Auxentius' account is difficult as he was the only one of the authors we have mentioned

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, Thompson (1966, 24), Heather (1991, 105) and Češka (2000, 115).

¹⁷⁹ Schäferdiek (1996, 5) interpreted Auxentius' words as meaning that Ulfilas was bishop in Roman territory for 40 years; to this he then added 7 years in Gothia and arrived at 47 years, i.e. a range of 336–383.

who knew Ulfilas personally. He even tells us that he was brought up by Ulfilas as his own son and that he personally wrote down what Ulfilas said (*eum dixisse et nos descripsisse*). In this light, there is a reluctance among scholars to ignore Auxentius' data, so they either modify Philostorgius' text or interpret it to mean that Ulfilas was in Roman territory twice.

Barnes offers an elegant solution, reasoning that the small gathering of bishops necessary for the consecration of Ulfilas could very well have been present at Constantine's court during the celebration of his *tricennialia* (the 30th anniversary of his reign) in 336.¹⁸⁰ It would certainly also make sense for a delegation from Gothia to present itself at Constantine's court in Constantinople on the occasion of these celebrations. It could be argued that, were this true, it would probably have been mentioned by Constantine's biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea, but he describes relations with the barbarians in the latter part of Constantine's reign only in the broadest of terms. Most starkly, we can only make the jump to 336 if we ignore or modify the data given to us by Auxentius. If we were bold enough to make that leap, then we could even speculate that the consecration of Ulfilas may have occurred a little earlier, perhaps on 6 November 335, when Eusebius and five other bishops were present at the court in Constantinople to help the emperor decide how to proceed in the matter of the recalcitrant Athanasius (see above). One argument in favour of Ulfilas' mission being closer to 332 than to 337 is that the Goths wanted to be on good terms with Constantine¹⁸¹ after 332 and engaged "in reasonable negotiations" with him in order to "finally, in this way, learn to serve Rome".¹⁸²

Scholars are thus divided on whether Ulfilas became bishop during the reign of Constantine or Constantius II. This split more or less mirrors whether they have chosen to follow the testimony of Philostorgius (for the period before 337) or Auxentius (for the period after 337).¹⁸³ Most

¹⁸⁰ Barnes, "The Consecration of Ulfila", 545.

¹⁸¹ Eutrop. X, 7, 1.

¹⁸² Euseb. VC IV, 5, 2.

¹⁸³ Potter (2004, 444) joins Barnes (1990) and Schäferdiek (1996, 5) in believing that Ulfilas was ordained as bishop during the reign of Constantine. Although guided by Barnes, Potter seems to prefer a range of 336–337. Sivan (1996, 381) opts for the part of 337 after Constantine's death (arguing that the arrival of envoys is usually associated with a change on the throne). Wolfram (2007, 83; 2010, 42; 2011, 28), on the other hand, is convinced that the consecration took place during the reign of Constantius II, specifically

accept the traditional date of Ulfilas' consecration, i.e. 341, and, counting back from that, the year of Ulfilas' birth, i.e. 311.¹⁸⁴

PERSIA

At the very end of his life, Constantine was planning a campaign against Persia. As in his efforts to impose his will on the Sarmatians and Goths and to seize control of the territory beyond the Danube, here too he may have wanted to match or even surpass Trajan.¹⁸⁵ As we already know, his nephew (the later emperor Julian), in his *Caesares*, measured Constantine against Trajan, Augustus, Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, and Alexander the Great in a fictional contest presided over by the Olympian gods. Although the outcome of that contest did Constantine no favours, the comparison may indicate that Julian knew of Constantine's expansionist plans on both the Danube and the Eastern frontier.¹⁸⁶ And though Constantine had failed to reconquer Trajan's Dacia in the mid-330s, he still had a chance at Persia.

At this point, we should briefly remind ourselves of the history of relations between Rome and the Sasanians at the turn of the fourth century. We have already mentioned the harshness of the terms to which the Persian king Narseh was forced to accede in 299 following his defeat by the tetrarchs. The Romans gained control of Armenia and the five Persian satrapies between the Tigris and Armenia. Everything west of the Upper Tigris was now Roman.¹⁸⁷ This was the greatest Roman victory in the East since the time of Trajan and secured peace there for a very long time. The conditions were also respected even by Narseh's son Hormizd II

in or shortly before 341; Heather and Matthews (1991, 133), Češka (2000, 144), and Bednaříková (2003, 73) take the same view. Lenski (2002, 119) and Kulikowski (2007b, 107) consider both versions possible. As for myself, I have previously suggested that Ulfilas participated in a diplomatic mission to the capital sometime in the 330s (perhaps as early as 333 or 334) and was ordained bishop later (in or shortly before 341), when he travelled to Roman territory once more specifically for his consecration (Doležal 2008a, 259–266). Wolfram (2011, 27–29) makes the same argument.

¹⁸⁴ It is pertinent that an international symposium entitled “Wulfila 311–2011” was held at Uppsala University in June 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 261.

¹⁸⁶ Julianus, *Caesares* 329c. Julian at least says that Constantine regained possession of those areas previously conquered by Trajan. See also Bleckmann (1995, 50–53).

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 4.

(302–309). After Hormizd's death, his eldest son succeeded him for a very short time before being killed by Persian nobles; another of his sons was blinded, and a further, also named Hormizd, was imprisoned, but managed to escape and gain asylum in Roman territory (see below). The Persian royal crown was eventually given to the fourth and youngest son—reportedly still an infant—Shapur II, who reigned from 309 to 379. For almost the entirety of Constantine's career, peace reigned between the two empires. Licinius may have waged a brief campaign in the East in 313 or 314, but from then on all was quiet until, evidently, 336.¹⁸⁸

If Constantine was plotting to start a war against Persia in 337, did the change on the Armenian throne play any role in this? Or was his decision swayed by previous Persian interference in Armenia? Some authors argue that it was, but before we explore these views we should also look a little further into the country's deeper past. The history of Armenia at this particular time (dating back to the middle of the third century) is rather blurred. A long line of respected writers maintains that, in 252 (or 253), Persian expansionism resulted in the Armenian king Chosroes being killed, Armenia being overrun by the Persians, and Chosroes' son, Tiridates, being forced to flee to Roman territory and seek the emperor Gallienus' protection. This prince then lived in Roman exile, where he embraced Christianity, and in 287 (or possibly around 290) Diocletian installed him as king of part of Armenia under the name Tiridates III (most of the land remained under the rule of the Persian king). When Narseh was warring against the Romans (or shortly before), Tiridates was briefly expelled again by the Persians (around 296), but after the great Roman victory over the Persians he was reinstated, this time to rule over the whole country. He died in 330.¹⁸⁹ Chronologically alone, this view is implausible; authors specialising in the history of Arsacid Armenia and Sasanian Persia reconstruct the succession of Armenian kings quite differently.

The following reconstruction diverges considerably from the standard view, but is much more reasonable: Tiridates II ruled from 217 to 252;

¹⁸⁸ Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 207.

¹⁸⁹ This framework is respected and described in whole or in part by Barnes (1981, 6), Potter (2004, 292), Pohlsander (2004, 81), Southern (2004, 78), Bowman (2008a, 73), Leadbetter (2009, 88), Harries (2012, 36), and Odahl (2013, 45). Frye (2008, 470–471), however, expresses doubts.

this was followed by a Persian interregnum; then, Tiridates' son Chosroes II was king (279–287), but only in the western part of Armenia and as a Roman client; after his assassination by the Persians, another of Tiridates' sons, Tiridates III, took to the throne (287–297); after Diocletian's victory over Persia, the son of Chosroes II, Tiridates IV, was installed as king (298–330); the place occupied in the Arsacid dynasty by his successor, Chosroes III (330–337), is unknown to us.¹⁹⁰ This chronology would mean, among other things, that the celebrated Armenian king who, according to tradition, made Christianity the state religion of Armenia sometime in the early fourth century was not Tiridates III, but Tiridates IV.¹⁹¹ According to another view, King Tiridates II (217–252) was ousted in 252; this was followed by the Persian interregnum in Armenia, with Tiridates III not being installed until 298. After his death in 330, Chosroes II became king and reigned until 338.¹⁹²

The differences between the reconstructions above show that even the order of the Armenian kings during the tetrarchy is hard to define. It is impossible to make any categorical statements here. The same goes for the situation during the reign of Constantine. Nevertheless, Hugh Elton, for example, claims that “in 335, Sapur occupied Armenia, removing the Christian king Tigran VII, grandson of Trdat”.¹⁹³ Timothy Barnes, for his part, says that, in 336, a Persian army under the command of the royal prince Narseh placed a Persian candidate on the Armenian throne.¹⁹⁴ Yet in 335, it would appear, Chosroes III (or II) was on the Armenian throne, and he was succeeded either by Tigranes V (!) in 338¹⁹⁵ or by Arshak II in 338 or 339!¹⁹⁶ In 337, then, there was probably no “Armenian question” (at least as far as the matter of succession was concerned) for Constantine to resolve or to use as a pretext to invade the Persian Empire. However, if

¹⁹⁰ Lightfoot, “Armenia and the eastern marches”, 497. Payaslian (2007, 33–36) follows a similar line, and also explains how Diocletian was able to install a Christian king in Armenia: Tiridates IV, loyal to Rome, was an ally against the Sasanians.

¹⁹¹ Potter (2004, 445) and Elton (2018, 54–55) say that Christianity became the state religion of Armenia in 313 or 314 (in their opinion, under Tiridates III).

¹⁹² Lang, “Iran, Armenia and Georgia”, 518.

¹⁹³ Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 69.

¹⁹⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 166.

¹⁹⁵ Lang, “Iran, Armenia and Georgia”, 518.

¹⁹⁶ Lightfoot, “Armenia and the eastern marches”, 496.

Constantine was bent on matching Trajan—or at least Diocletian—then he probably did have certain designs on Armenia.

This is why Constantine did not use Hormizd as an excuse to attack Persia, as he would then have had to place the prince on the Persian throne after this victory. Although Hormizd was available—he lived in his own palace on the shores of the Sea of Marmara in Constantinople—the emperor was not counting on him as a future Persian king, a role he had evidently reserved for his nephew Hannibalianus (see the next chapter). It was Julian, on his Persian campaign in 363, who would want to put this idea into action, and he even placed Hormizd in charge of some of the cavalry as one of the Roman commanders.¹⁹⁷

The *casus belli* presented by Eusebius is nothing other than we would expect of him: Constantine, he says, felt himself to be the protector of Christians throughout the East, even outside the Roman Empire—in Iberia (present-day Georgia), Armenia, and even Persia itself. In fact, the emperor wrote Shapur a handwritten letter (in Latin) to that effect.¹⁹⁸ And, having heard of the “disturbances among the eastern barbarians”, he started preparations to go to war against Persia, saying that this was the only victory he had yet to achieve.¹⁹⁹ When it became clear that Constantine was gearing up for an invasion, Shapur sent envoys to the emperor to appease him or, failing that, at least to try to negotiate with him.²⁰⁰ Constantine, however, seems determined not to let anyone take this war away from him. He dismissed the envoys empty-handed and continued his preparations.²⁰¹

As we saw in Chapter 8, the reason touted by Constantine for going to war with Licinius in 324 was to help the Christians in the East by liberating them from oppression. He took a similar line now by (if Eusebius is to be believed) expressing concern for the fate of the Christians in

¹⁹⁷ Amm. Marc. XXIV, 1, 2.

¹⁹⁸ Euseb. VC IV, 9–13.

¹⁹⁹ Euseb. VC IV, 56–57.

²⁰⁰ Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 69.

²⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of Eusebius and other sources that cover this incident, see Fowden (1994).

Persia.²⁰² While it is essentially immaterial which side began the hostilities (and our sources are divided on this question), it could certainly be argued that Constantine intended to mount a campaign in the East for reasons similar to those for which Septimius Severus and Carus undertook them, and similar to those for which Probus and Aurelian had planned to undertake them: he wanted fame as a warrior, the spoils of victory, and perhaps new territory; in Constantine's case, there was also a desire to consolidate his dynasty's future position within the empire, to place his nephew on the Persian royal throne, and to show the world that he had left a better legacy than the pagan emperor Diocletian (and perhaps also Trajan). His religious fervour—indisputably genuine—only armed him with another reason that could be presented to the public. Whatever the case, his death on 22 May 337 put an end to these plans.

CONCLUSION

In many respects, Constantine's reign is so firmly rooted in the era of the tetrarchy that it would be difficult to assess without comparing it to that of Diocletian. And yet such a comparison in itself is by no means easy. Constantine was undoubtedly a talented politician and a great military leader, and in both these roles he would evidently have surpassed Diocletian had they followed similar paths to power. Diocletian, having gained power over the whole empire relatively quickly and able to delegate internal and external wars to his fellow emperors, did not need these skills. Constantine, on the other hand, never had to prove his talent for reforming the empire because, as he gradually took over its various territories, he found that everywhere he went the road had already been paved by Diocletian—the administration of the empire, the tax, monetary, and legal systems, and the structure of the army. Wisely, Constantine accepted and persevered with all these Diocletian reforms, to the extent that there are few places where we can reliably identify Constantine's own significant contribution, such as in the monetary system or the system of military command.

The starkest difference between Diocletian and Constantine lies, of course, in their religious policies. Each progressed along his own path in broaching the subject of Christianity, though initially both were evidently

²⁰² Harries (2012, 134) talks openly about Constantine's "religious imperialism" and says that in both 324 and 337 Constantine was using religion as justification for expansion.

indifferent to it. While Diocletian gradually progressed towards fierce suppression, Constantine slowly began to promote Christianity just as assiduously, programmatically, and methodically. Both paths raised major problems, attesting to how short-sighted both these emperors were in religious matters. And perhaps the best way to compare Diocletian and Constantine as personalities is in terms of their approach to power. For Constantine, his entire career was driven by a lust for power, whereas for Diocletian the ultimate goal was not power, but the preservation and reform of the empire. Hence his voluntarily relinquishment of power once he considered his job done. Because of their different attitudes towards Christianity, history has bequeathed Constantine the epithet Great, but denied it to Diocletian. If we were to evaluate their contributions to the state dispassionately and objectively, it is actually Diocletian who deserves to be called “Great” (and he perhaps would have been named thus if he had not persecuted Christians), whereas Constantine, had he not converted to Christianity, would have been “Relatively Successful And Slightly Above Average”.

The eminent British scholar A. H. M. Jones, in his monograph on Constantine, wrote that neither the character nor the ability of this monarch much merits the title “Great”. He argues that Constantine was inconsistent in his decision-making, prone to mood swings, highly susceptible to flattery, and let himself be influenced by dominating figures who happened to be in proximity to him. His financial policy was ruinous for the empire for years afterwards. Though Constantine’s religious policy aimed for unity in the Christian church, here—as in the administration of the empire—he lacked firmness and consistency. The military was the only area in which he excelled, both as a leader and as the architect of a new concept for the defence of the empire. I cannot but agree with that assessment.²⁰³ In the context of the political history of the third and fourth centuries, and especially compared to Diocletian or Aurelian, Constantine seems to be nothing more than a second-rate emperor. Even his long-time rival Licinius appears to have been cut from better cloth, both as

²⁰³ Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, 232–233. Constantine was appraised in a similar light by the great German scholar Theodor Mommsen (2005, 514 ff.). Naturally, views can be found that are almost the complete opposite. For example, Charles Odahl (2013, 286) considers Constantine “the greatest of the Illyrian soldier emperors”.

a statesman and a person. All that remains to be added is that Constantine surpassed most of his fellow contemporary emperors in his cruelty and lust for power. And his (putting it mildly) callous attitude towards members of his own family was clearly inherited by his three sons, whose continuation of the chain of violence within the Constantinian family will be explored in the last chapter.

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Epilogue: The Death of Constantine and the Massacre of His Relatives

As previously mentioned, Constantine died in a suburb of Nicomedia on 22 May 337. His death in itself was nothing out of the ordinary (the circumstances are described in Chapter 5). More interesting is what happened in the weeks or months that followed: the slaughter wrought upon much of the Constantinian dynasty. The question is: on whose orders?

By the time of Constantine's death, his extended family had already been whittled down to its bare bones. His mother Helena had probably died in 329, his sister Constantia in 330.¹ His brother Hannibalianus had also expired at some point, though we are not told exactly when (apparently before 337). His wife Fausta: dead. His son Crispus: gone. His sister Eutropia was still alive, and perhaps Anastasia, too. As, of course, were Constantine's three sons Constantius, Constantine, and Constans, his two daughters Helena and Constantina, and his half-brothers Flavius Dalmatius and Julius Constantius. Shortly after Constantine's death, there was another—and this time dramatic—thinning of his family.

In the early 330s, Constantine appears to have decided that, after his death, the empire would be ruled by members of his dynasty from both

¹ Pohlsander, "Constantia", 163.

family lines, i.e. not only by his own sons, especially the elder Constantine and Constantius, both of whom already held the title of *caesar*, but also by the line of his father Constantius I and his father's wife Theodora (whose children and their families had been tucked out of sight, essentially exiled, until then). In 333, Constantine's half-brother Flavius Dalmatius was given a consulship and the honorary title of *censor*. In the same year, Constantine's son Constans was made a *caesar*. Julius Constantius, another half-brother, was appointed consul for the year 335 and given the grand titles of *patricius* and *nobilissimus*; in the same year, Flavius Dalmatius' two sons were singled out for impressive promotions: Dalmatius became *caesar* and his brother Hannibalianus was bestowed with the title *rex regum et gentium Ponticarum* ("king of kings and Pontic peoples"), evidently intended to secure the holder's future control over Armenia and, prospectively, Persia, against which Constantine was planning war towards the end of his reign.² Exactly how Constantine proposed to divide the empire between these young members of the dynasty is anyone's guess. He may have planned to confer the title of *augustus* on both Constantine and Constantius, while leaving Constantius and Dalmatius as *caesares*.³ This would have restored the tetrarchy, but in a new form termed by Odahl as a "Christian dynastic tetrarchy".⁴ Frakes offers a different view: all of Constantine's sons were to be elevated to *augusti*, and Dalmatius and Hannibalianus would have been *caesares*.⁵

Whatever Constantine's plans for his succession, he died during the preparations for the Persian campaign, at which point there was effectively an interregnum since no member of the dynasty held the title of *augustus*, but there were four *caesares*; legally, however, this was not the case, since laws continued to be issued in the name of Constantine.⁶ It was not until

² Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 459. In Chapter 3, we saw that Odaenathus' decision to style himself "king of kings" in the 260s had been taken as a blatant insult by the Persian king Shapur because this was a title reserved for Sasanian rulers. Conflicting with literary sources, the name of the *caesar* Dalmatius usually appears on coins as Delmatius (Bruun 1966, 31).

³ In any case, all four had already been assigned territories: Constantine II was handed control of the West, Constantius II the East, Constans Italy, Africa and Pannonia, and Dalmatius most of the Balkans—the dioceses of *Thracia* and *Moesiae* (Barnes 1982, 199–200). Constantine doubtless retained overall control.

⁴ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 264.

⁵ Frakes, "The Dynasty of Constantine Down to 363", 95.

⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 167.

9 September, more than three months later, that all three of Constantine's sons received the title of *augustus* from the army at a meeting in Sirmium. The *caesar* Dalmatius could not have joined them as he was dead by then, a victim of the massacre perpetrated over a short period of time in or around Constantinople.⁷ We do not know exactly when this event occurred because our sources are sketchy on the details, but in all probability it took place early in June.⁸ Two of the sons of Constantius I and Theodora were killed: Julius Constantius and Flavius Dalmatius. Their brother Hannibalianus was probably already dead by this time, as no source lists him as a victim of the purge. The eldest son of Julius Constantius, whose name we do not know, also died, as did Flavius Dalmatius' two sons, the *caesar* Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, who boasted the still empty title of *rex regum et gentium Ponticarum*. Further casualties included four other cousins of the future emperor Julian, though of these we otherwise know nothing. Julian himself, in his *Letter to the Senate and the People of Athens* (270c-d), mentions that six (!) of his cousins perished at this time.

Many high-ranking individuals are said to have died alongside these members of the Constantinian dynasty. Specifically, we can name Flavius Optatus (*patricius* and consul in 334) and Flavius Ablabius (praetorian prefect and consul in 331). Virius Nepotianus, consul in 336 and evidently the husband of Eutropia, one of Constantius I's daughters, may have been killed, too.⁹ If so, this meant that all three daughters of Constantius I had now been widowed as a result of the executions of

⁷ In Eusebius' speech (*De laudibus Constantini* III, 4) delivered at the imperial palace in Constantinople during the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Constantine's reign (his *tricennalia*) in 336, four *caesares* are mentioned as Constantine's assistants; the *Life of Constantine* (VC IV, 51, 1), written after the emperor's death, speaks only of three: Dalmatius suffered *damnatio memoriae* in 337 and thus was treated by everyone as though he had never existed.

⁸ Barnes initially (1981, 261–262) dates the massacre to between 2 August and 9 September, but later (2014, 168) refers more generally to the summer. Kienast (1996, 307) contemplates the period before 9 September, but has doubts. September is also preferred by Potter (2004, 460–461). Burgess (2008) has convincingly demonstrated that the event must have occurred during the summer, probably as early as the time of Constantine's burial.

⁹ We cannot be sure of this because a son of Eutropia, Constantine's nephew Nepotianus, tried to usurp imperial power in Rome in 350 and was executed; by all accounts, Virius Nepotianus was his father. See Burgess (2008, 10, note 34); *PLRE I*, 625; Barnes (1982, 108).

their husbands: in 316, Anastasia's husband Bassianus was put to death by Constantine; in 325, Constantia's husband Licinius had suffered the same fate. The high-ranking officials assassinated in 337 must have lost their lives because of their close ties to the executed members of the dynasty.

Surprisingly, two of Julius Constantius' sons were spared during this bloodbath: Julian (then probably 6 years old) and his brother Gallus (11 or 12 and reportedly sick at the time).¹⁰ The reasons given for this show of mercy were that Julian was still young and Gallus' serious illness meant he was likely to meet a natural end soon anyway. Presumably, the fact of the matter was that they simply posed no threat and were therefore given a (temporary?) reprieve.

For a long time, the official interpretation of these events, as presented by the Constantinian propaganda machine, was that the army had revolted because it was supposedly unhappy that Constantine's sons were to share power with other relatives.¹¹ Eusebius is the most florid in this sense, saying that as soon as the news of Constantine's death reached the troops, all the soldiers, as if by a miracle, suddenly decided "not to recognise anyone but Constantine's sons as emperor"; the bishop remains chastely silent on the massacre itself.¹² This interpretation has to be classed among the "official lies" concocted by the Constantinian dynasty. The purge is extremely unlikely to have been initiated by the army. The perpetrators would have had to be punished later and, above all, someone would have had to have incited the soldiers and directed their actions. And yet there is no trace of any leaders in the sources, let alone any trials. If the army had mutinied, it would have been inconceivable for the culprits—real or planted—not to have been convicted and executed, since the authority of the new emperors was at stake. Furthermore, such spontaneity by the army would have had no precedent in the history of the Roman Empire.¹³ For the sake of completeness, we should add that one later source has Constantine poisoned by his brothers (presumably his

¹⁰ According to Bowersock (1978, 22), Julian was born in 331; *PLRE I* (477) says 332. Gallus was born in 325 or 326 according to *PLRE I* (224).

¹¹ *Aur. Vict.* 41, 22; *Epitome* 41, 18.

¹² Euseb. *VC IV*, 68, 2.

¹³ One possible case of a "spontaneous reduction in the number of co-rulers" can be identified in the events of summer 238, when the praetorians in Rome killed the senatorial emperors Pupienus and Balbinus so that Gordian III alone could rule; here, however, our sources are too scant for us to decide whether this was a spontaneous act.

half-brothers Julius Constantius and Flavius Dalmatius), and the soldiers were thus avenging the emperor's death.¹⁴ Tall though this tale is,¹⁵ it is ingeniously spun.¹⁶

If the initiative had not come from the officers or generals, it must have been the work of another superior authority. Of Constantine's sons, only the 19-year-old Constantius made it to his deathbed. He had set off from Antioch in all haste upon hearing of his father's illness, but found Constantine already dead; he therefore at least had the body transported to Constantinople and made all the arrangements for the funeral ceremony. The future Constantine II, a year older, was in Trier at this time, and the youngest, Constans, was probably in Italy.¹⁷ Only Constantius was in Constantinople when the massacre was carried out, and hence, responsibility for it (whether or not direct) rested on his shoulders. In this light, G. W. Bowersock has rightly observed that not to suspect Constantius II of these murders is as difficult for modern historians as it was back then for Julian, who lost most of his relatives in the purge.¹⁸ When Julian went to war against his cousin Constantius II in 361, he wrote the aforementioned letter to the senate and people of Athens; in it, no longer having to stick to the official version, he openly accused his cousin of the murders. Other sources follow the same line.¹⁹

As with other issues related to Constantine or his dynasty, scholarly opinion is divided. Some give credence to the version that this was an army initiative in which Constantius II was not—or at least may not have been—involved.²⁰ Variations on this theme include a military coup staged with the tacit approval of Constantine's sons,²¹ or opportunism on the

¹⁴ Philost. *HE* II, 4. This story is regurgitated by Zonaras (XIII, 4).

¹⁵ Lenski, "The Reign of Constantine", 90, note 143.

¹⁶ Burgess, "The Summer of Blood", 20. Cf. Stephenson (2010, 289–290), who explores whether there could be any truth to it.

¹⁷ Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 85–86.

¹⁸ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 23.

¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus (XXI, 16, 8; XXV, 3, 23) and Zosimus (II, 40) are convinced that Constantius II played an active role in the killings. Other sources imply Constantius' indirect responsibility (Socr. *HE* II, 25, 3; Eutr. X, 9).

²⁰ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 84; Češka, *Zánik antického světa*, 93–94; and initially Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 262.

²¹ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 277.

part of Constantius II, who saw what was happening but did not intervene (aside from saving Julian and Gallus).²² David Potter, on the other hand, views Constantius II as the agent of events and even compares this purge to the one Julian carried out after his accession in 361 against the people of the old regime, i.e. those serving Constantius II, which was later criticised by Julian's admirer Ammianus Marcellinus.²³ Richard Burgess is another who believes that Constantius II was in some way actively involved in the massacre in the summer of 337, irrespective of whether it was a prearranged plot or a spur-of-the-moment decision.²⁴

If Constantius II was truly responsible for the massacre, this can only mean that he decided to have his two uncles and seven of his nine cousins killed. As such, when it came to slaying blood relatives, Constantius II easily outdid his father Constantine, who only executed his own son and nephew. Having said that, over the course of his career Constantine had seven of his relatives disposed of: his wife's father (Maximianus, executed or forced to commit suicide in 310), his wife's brother (Maxentius, defeated and killed in battle in 312), his sister Anastasia's husband (Bassianus, executed on Constantine's orders in 316), his sister Constantia's husband (Licinius, executed on Constantine's orders in 325) and son (Licinius the younger, executed on Constantine's orders in 326), his own son (Crispus, executed on Constantine's orders in 326), and probably even his wife (Fausta, executed on Constantine's orders in 326; see Chapter 9).

To put this into perspective, we could compare this list to the deeds of Constantine's long-time co-ruler Licinius, who also had plenty of blood on his hands. We have seen how, having vanquished Maximinus in 313, Licinius had seven surviving members of the "extended tetrarchic family" slaughtered: Maximinus' wife and two children, Galerius' widow

²² Frakes, "The Dynasty of Constantine Down to 363", 99. To this we can add, in agreement with Burgess (2008, 26), that Constantius may have saved both his cousins in the sense that he did not order their execution.

²³ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 460–461; Amm. Marc. XXII, 3. Cf. Bowersock (1978, 66) ("Julian himself was conspicuously absent from the panel of judges, perhaps to ensure fair and disinterested verdicts but more probably to free himself from direct personal responsibility for any decision that was unjust, yet politically desirable").

²⁴ Burgess, "The Summer of Blood", 42. Barnes (2014, 168) later changed his mind and agreed with Burgess. Potter (2013, 293) also had second thoughts, but in the other direction ("Constantine II and Constantius II [...] are unlikely to have been the prime movers").

Valeria and her mother Prisca (whom Diocletian had earlier placed under Licinius' protection), Valeria's stepson Candidianus, and Severianus, the son of the emperor Severus. *But at least it could be said that this was not Licinius' own flesh and blood.* The killings in the summer of 337, too, were intended as a one-off purge, and it was most likely Constantius II who ordered the murder of nine male members of the parallel Constantinian bloodline, and thus his own relatives. If Julian is to be believed, Constantius II later even admitted his own guilt and, not surprisingly, bore it heavily; he even blamed it for his childlessness and his failure in the war with the Persians.²⁵ What we do not know, however, is whether he was going ahead with a preconceived plan or acting impulsively; if it was a plan, it is not entirely clear whether Constantius' brothers had any inkling of it, nor do we know whether they reproached him for this decision when they met in Sirmium.

Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans made their separate ways to Sirmium, the last arriving in early September 337 at the latest,²⁶ to be acclaimed *augusti* on 9 September by the army that had gathered there for the campaign against the Sarmatians. Then, to legitimise their position further, the emperors sent tidings of this acclamation to the senate and people of Rome.²⁷ They also divided up the dead Dalmatius' share, with Constantius II receiving the Thracian diocese and Constans the Moesian. Constantine II thus left the meeting with what he had come: he remained in charge of the West, i.e. Hispania, Gaul, and Britain. Constantius II essentially annexed the territory of present-day Bulgaria, the European part of Turkey, and parts of northern Greece to his Eastern lands. The biggest winner was Constans: now, in addition to Italy and Africa, he had been handed control over two-thirds of the Balkans. Although each

²⁵ Julian, *Letter to the Senate and the People of Athens* 270A.

²⁶ Češka (2000, 94) was drawing on older historiography (e.g. Kienast 1996, 312) when he claimed that the three brothers met elsewhere (in Viminacium) and later (in 338). According to Burgess (2008, 40), the brothers must have gathered in Sirmium no later than the end of August 337, with their negotiations extending into early September. By all accounts, the first to arrive was Constantine II (in mid-to-late July), followed by Constantius II (late July) and Constans (late August).

²⁷ At some point after that date, Constantine became known as the "father of emperors" (*pater augustorum*) and was deified (*divus Constantinus*). See Kienast (1996, 301).

of the brothers now had four dioceses,²⁸ the outcome of the negotiations appears not to have been to the liking of the eldest, Constantine II, who had evidently had his eyes on the prize of Italy and Africa and also seems to have wanted some form of guardianship over the youngest brother, Constans.²⁹ Relations between these two brothers thus remained strained. Nevertheless, for now Constantine II made his way back to the West, where he fought the Germani on the Rhine (probably in 338).³⁰ Following the brothers' conference in Sirmium, Constans remained in his territory in the Balkans, where (apparently in 338) he fought the Sarmatians; over the next three years, his presence is attested not only in Naissus, but also in Thessalonica, Viminacium, and Sirmium. Constantine II exploited Constans' absence from Italy by mounting a surprise invasion here with his army in early 340. Equally surprisingly, he was killed soon afterwards in a minor skirmish at Aquileia. It could be argued that the chain of violence within the Constantinian family had reached its third phase. Constans not only took over all his brother's territories in the West, but also obliterated his memory (by inflicting *damnatio memoriae* on him).³¹ In the years that followed, Constans would move around Italy, Gaul, Britain, and Pannonia until, in early 350, he was killed in Gaul during the general Magnentius' usurpation.

After the conference in Sirmium, Constantius II returned to Constantinople and then set out for Antioch, where he would turn his attention to the threat posed by Persia. From 350, he would be the sole legitimate ruler of the entire empire, but would not succeed in ousting the usurper Magnentius until 353. In the meantime, he appointed his cousin Gallus to co-rule with him and bestowed on him the title of *caesar* (351), only to have him executed in 354. This was the final link in the chain of violence within the Constantinian family; the only male member from the entire family remaining alive at this point (apart from Constantius) was Gallus' half-brother Julian. By Constantius' decision, Julian, too, was

²⁸ According to Barnes (1982, 199–200), the dioceses were distributed as follows: *Oriens, Asiana, Pontica, Thracia* (Constantius II); *Britanniae, Galliae, Viennensis, Hispaniae* (Constantine II); *Moeciae, Pannoniae, Italia, Africa* (Constans).

²⁹ *Epitome* 41, 21; Zos. II, 41.

³⁰ The movements of all three brothers' courts after 337 are tracked by Barnes (2001, 218–225).

³¹ Kienast (1996, 310) and Hunt (1998, 5) date Constantine's invasion generally to the spring of 340 and his death to early April.

made *caesar* (355), but after he was proclaimed *augustus* by his soldiers in Paris (*Lutetia Parisiorum*) in 360, a civil war ensued between him and Constantius. Before the two emperors' armies could do battle, Constantius II died of a fever (361) and all rule passed to Julian as the last emperor of the Constantinian dynasty.

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APPENDIX A: CLAUDIUS GOTHICUS AS A PURPORTED ANCESTOR OF CONSTANTINE

One of the ways in which Constantine strengthened his claim to power was by spreading the word of his reported kinship with the emperor Claudius II, aka Claudius Gothicus (who reigned from 268 to 270). Claudius was one of the Illyrian emperors fêted for defeating the barbarians and safeguarding the empire. Later sources—and his very agnomen—constantly remind us of his great victory over the Goths in the Balkans.¹ He was even known to be well connected with the Roman senate. His persona was not in the least controversial, which is probably precisely why Constantine landed on him as his ancestor.² True, Claudius ruled for only two years, so his mission had to be continued (and successfully completed) by Aurelian. Unlike Claudius, however, Aurelian was not so uncontroversial a figure, at least from Constantine’s point of view.³ Plus there is the fact that Claudius is portrayed by our sources as someone who had unanimous backing to take the purple after Gallienus’ assassination, in which he reportedly played no role. Furthermore, he was not removed by force—the sad fate of most 3rd-century emperors—but

¹ Eutr. IX, 11; Aur. Vict. 34; Zos. I, 41–46; Oros. *Hist.* VII, 23.

² There is also the possibility that Claudius was cleaned up by much later pro-Constantinian propaganda to make him look irreproachable.

³ See Chapter 3. Aurelian is identified by Constantinian sources—and by Constantine himself—as a persecutor.

fell victim to an epidemic. Aurelian, on the other hand, does appear to have Gallienus' blood on his hands, was certainly involved in the removal of Quintillus, and was himself killed in an assassination plot. If I were Constantine in 309, contemplating whom to choose as a forefather to my father, Claudius II would have seemed the perfect choice even to me.⁴ Then, all that was left was to come up with a plausible way of explaining this kinship.

Constantine began to drop hints of this kinship only after the death of Maximian. The world first heard about the supposed family link in 310, when it was mentioned, almost in passing, by an anonymous orator delivering a speech in Trier to mark the foundation of the city. The speaker decided to tread lightly; he started with the forewarning that what he was about to say might come as a surprise to many of those present, but that it was old news to Constantine's intimate friends, among whom the orator evidently counted himself. He then implied, without elaborating, that the emperor derived his descent from Claudius.⁵ If this were true, why had it not been made known much earlier? Because until 306, there had been no problems in the running of the tetrarchic system, in which kinship, marriage, and adoption were meant to play second fiddle to the much greater emphasis that was placed on personal ability and merit. In 307, when the first cracks began to show in this model of tetrarchy, Constantine married Maximian's daughter, Fausta. This dynastic union bolstered his legitimacy and claim to the throne, which until then had rested on two shaky pillars: the purported elevation of Constantine to the position of *augustus* (or *caesar*) by Constantius I and the subsequent recognition of his title of *caesar* by Galerius. Now, Maximian had not only conferred the title of *augustus* on Constantine, but also, through Fausta, consolidated his status as a member of the "extended tetrarchic family". Galerius

⁴ Neither Tacitus nor Probus was a viable option. They are too close in time, so it could only be claimed that Constantius I was the son or nephew of one of them, which would simply not have washed.

⁵ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 2 (*a primo igitur incipiam originis tuae numine, quod plerique adhuc fortasse nesciunt, sed qui te amant plurimum sciunt. Ab illo enim divo Claudio manat in te avita cognatio*). The term *avita cognatio* used here cannot be interpreted to mean that Claudius was Constantine's grandfather, for then he would have had to be Constantius' father. Barnes (1982, 36) reconstructed the names of Constantius' parents as Flavius Dalmatius and Julia Constantia (i.e., of course, a mere hypothesis); the full name of the emperor Claudius was Marcus Aurelius Valerius Claudius. We should take *avita cognatio* to mean kinship in general.

no longer viewed Constantine as a member of the imperial college, but that does not seem to have made any difference to Constantine.

The expeditions undertaken by Severus and Galerius himself to Italy, Domitius Alexander's act of usurpation in Africa, the schism between Maximian and his son Maxentius, and even the Conference of Carnuntum had no significant effect on Constantine's position in Gaul, Britain, and Hispania. Constantine undoubtedly followed these events, but did not intervene in any way. The situation changed for him in 310, with the rebellion and death of Maximian: on the one hand, Constantine weathered the crisis and consolidated his rule; on the other, he urgently needed to find a "replacement" source of legitimacy, which is precisely why the news of the supposed kinship between Constantine and Claudius made it into the world in that year.⁶ A year later, this kinship was mentioned—also very briefly, and again very vaguely—by another anonymous orator in Trier.⁷ Why are the accounts in the panegyrics so hazy? Perhaps because, in 311, there were still people alive who remembered 270 and the emperor Claudius?

Shortly thereafter, Constantine decided to give this propaganda a more anchored, but still indefinite, form. In 312 (or a little later), two inscriptions were made in Italy that identified Constantine as Claudius' grandson (or other descendant).⁸ Constantine was plainly sowing pro-Claudian propaganda to show the people of Italy that he had a greater claim to rule than the recently deposed Maxentius.

Having won his first war with Licinius, Constantine seems to have felt the need to reassert his right to rule by bringing up his ancestor. Thus, in 317 and 318, mints in the territory controlled by Constantine struck coins bearing the inscription *DIVO CLAUDIO OPTIMO IMP[ERATORI]*, i.e. "to the divine Claudius, the best emperor"

⁶ Syme, *Historia Augusta Papers*, 63–79.

⁷ *Pan. Lat.* V (8), 2, 5 (*divum Claudium parentem tuum*); this phrase is repeated later in the text (4, 2). The panegyrist's use of *parens* here does not, of course, mean a parent or father, but simply an ancestor.

⁸ *ILS* 699 (*divi Claudii nepoti*); *ILS* 702 (*nepos divi Claudii*). Much like *avita cognatio* and *parens*, *nepos* is a polysemous term and can refer to either a grandchild specifically or a descendant generally.

(without specifying the relationship between Claudius and Constantine).⁹ Aside from the coins, the kinship of the two emperors is mentioned (probably in 319) by Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius when he flatters Constantine by proclaiming him better than his ancestor Claudius.¹⁰

Constantine's pro-Claudian propaganda can thus be divided into three phases: the first occurred after the removal of Maximian, the second after the elimination of Maxentius, and the third after the first war with Licinius. The fact that, in the second half of his reign, and especially after 324, Constantine no longer needed to commemorate his illustrious ancestor in any special way is pertinent: as ruler of the entire Roman world, he now had full and unquestionable legitimacy, not to mention that by this time there were few people left who had experienced Claudius' reign first-hand. Even so, propaganda, once released, has a life of its own and complete control over it may elude you, particularly if you are dead.

Which brings us to a fourth phase, which started with the death of Constantine, lasted for the rest of the fourth century, and resulted in a critical juncture, with some sources saying Constantius I was Claudius' great-nephew and others asserting that he was his grandson, i.e. they inserted a whole generation between Constantine and his famed ancestor. According to the *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, Constantius was "the grandson of the brother of the eminent emperor Claudius" (*Constantius, divi Claudii optimi principis nepos ex fratre*).¹¹ The emperor Julian, who must have known very well where his grandfather Constantius I came from, touches on the family line several times in his relatively extensive literary works, but never goes into specific detail. In three of his works—two panegyrics and one satire—he mentions that Constantine was related to Claudius, but we do not learn how.¹² A little later, Eutropius returns

⁹ See Bruun 1966, 180 (Trier, 318); 252 (Arles, 318); 310 (Rome, 317–318); 429 (Siscia, 317–318); 502 (Thessalonica, 317–318); et al.

¹⁰ Optat. *Carm* 10, 29–31 (*atavo summo melior! cui Claudius acer, magnanimum sidus, dat clarum e numine divo imperium*).

¹¹ *Origo* 1.1.

¹² See *Oratio* 1 (6 D), where Julian even makes a digression lauding Claudius for the way in which he ruled, and *Oratio* 2 (51 C), where he literally says that "the story of our family begins with Claudius". These two orations were composed while he was still

to the version that “Constantius is said to have been the son of the daughter of the emperor Claudius” (*Constantius per filiam nepos Claudii traditur*),¹³ and Jerome sticks to this story in his *Chronicle*.¹⁴ Later still, at the end of the fourth century, the *Historia Augusta*’s biography of the emperor Claudius combines all these approaches. First, it makes several vague allusions to this kinship,¹⁵ then it talks about Claudius having secured the rule of his future grandson by his glorious deeds,¹⁶ before, finally, going back on itself to contend that Constantius was a great nephew: Claudius’ brother Crispus is said to have had a daughter, Claudia, whose son was Constantius (the biography also recalls at this point that Claudius had another brother, Quintillus, who went on to become emperor).¹⁷

The original idea (the inscriptions from 312) does bear scrutiny. If Constantine was born in 272 and his father Constantius was born around 240, then his grandfather Claudius would probably have been born around 215, which is indeed possible; we know that Claudius came to rule at a ripe old age, but we cannot pinpoint his exact date of birth.¹⁸

However, the subsequent modification of the legend, shifting Constantine back one generation into the past, causes a major chronological headache, especially in the version concocted by Eutropius and Jerome. For if Constantine really were the great-grandson of the emperor Claudius, there would simply be no room to insert that extra generation,

Constantius II’s junior emperor, but he continues to adhere to official propaganda when he wrote his satirical work *Caesares*, by which time he was ruling the whole empire. Here, he says of Claudius that the Olympian gods themselves “assigned the government to his family, because they thought it just that the family of so patriotic a man should rule as long as possible” (Julian. *Caes.* 12).

¹³ Eutr. IX, 22, 1.

¹⁴ Hieron. *Chron.* s. a. 290 (*Constantius Claudii ex filia nepos fuit*); repeated verbatim in Jordanes, *Rom.* 298.

¹⁵ HA, *Claud.* 1, 1; 1, 3; 10, 7.

¹⁶ HA, *Claud.* 9, 9 (*ut iam tunc Constantio Caesari nepoti futuro videretur Claudius*).

¹⁷ HA, *Claud.* 13, 1–2 (*Quoniam res bellicas diximus, de Claudii genere et familia saltim pauca dicenda sunt, ne ea, quae scienda sunt, praeterisse videamur: Claudius, Quintillus et Crispus fratres fuerunt. Crispi f[am]ilia Claudia; ex ea et Eutropio, nobilissimo gentis Dardanae viro, Constantius Caesar est genitus*).

¹⁸ According to *PLRE I* (209, Claudius 11), Claudius was born “possibly in 214”.

even if we reassigned Constantine's birth to the 280s.¹⁹ In that case, his father Constantius would have to have been born in the 260s, but that is downright impossible given what we know of his career.²⁰ The version ventured by the *Origo* and *Historia Augusta* is not much more plausible. Here, Constantine is the great-grandson not of Claudius himself, but of Claudius' brother, who would have to have been born around 200 (in order for it to be possible for his grandson Constantius to have been born sometime between 240 and 250), making him about 15 years older than Claudius.

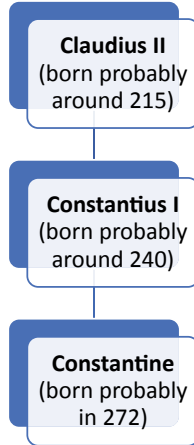
It is also worth noting that Orosius, in the early fifth century, knows nothing at all about Constantine's supposed kinship. By that time, this imperial propaganda had served its purpose and could be jettisoned, taking with it the link between a great Christian emperor and a pagan emperor. Orosius' interests lay elsewhere (to the extent that he was quite comfortable reporting that Constantine was born of Constantius' concubine Helena; see Chapter 4).²¹

¹⁹ Few modern historians entertain or accept the possibility that Constantine was born in the 280s (see Potter 2013, 28; Claus 1996, 19).

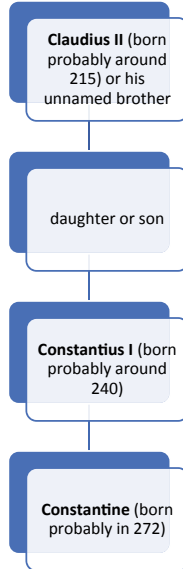
²⁰ As we have already seen, in the early 270s Constantius was engaged in important tasks for the emperor Aurelian in Asia Minor. Besides, Helena would then have been at least ten years older than him (see Drijvers 1992, 13), and in 293 Diocletian would obviously not have enlisted a man who had only recently celebrated his thirtieth birthday to co-rule with him.

²¹ Oros. *Hist.* VII, 25, 16 (*Constantinum filium ex concubina Helena creatum*).

Version 1: Two generations in a direct line (an idea thought up in 310-312)



Version 2: Three generations in a direct and indirect line (according to information disseminated after Constantine's death; note the highly problematic chronology)



Genealogical Chart A.1 Evolution of Constantinian propaganda on the kinship proclaimed between Constantine and Claudius II

APPENDIX B: THE PANEGYRICI LATINI

This is a collection of twelve Latin panegyrics, i.e. public speeches in praise of the emperor, compiled sometime in the late fourth century (the word “panegyric” was derived from the Greek *panēgyrikos*, which had come to mean a laudatory oration). The first in the sequence is Pliny’s thanksgiving speech to the emperor Trajan in 100 CE. It seems to have served as a model for anyone attempting to compose panegyrics to emperors in late antiquity. The other speeches date between 289 and 389 CE and were composed by various authors, many of whom are anonymous to us. Most were teachers of rhetoric and some held public office. The collection itself may have been compiled by one such teacher of rhetoric who evidently lived in Gaul, as most of the orations relate to or were given in this province. At least five—and possibly as many as seven—of the twelve panegyrics were delivered in Trier, an important administrative centre of the tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty and one of the largest cities in the West; it boasted an amphitheatre, a hippodrome, a bath complex, and a mint and was also the seat of the Gallic prefecture and often an imperial residence.

With the exception of Pliny’s speech, which is by far the oldest, the order of the panegyrics in the extant manuscripts is almost random. This is reflected in how they are arranged in modern editions: sometimes they follow the order in which the manuscripts have preserved them for us (e.g.

the still-standard edition drawn up by R. A. B. Mynors as *XII Panegyrici Latini*, Oxford, 1964); other times, they are ordered chronologically (e.g. by Emil Baehrens, who was the first to make an annotated edition of them as *XII Panegyrici Latini*, Teubner, 1874). To avoid confusion, in scholarly publications, the panegyrics are therefore always assigned Roman numerals (indicating their order in the manuscripts) and Arabic numerals (indicating their chronological order). All of these twelve panegyrics, save Pliny the Younger's, are available in a brilliant English translation by C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers.²² The panegyrics are listed with very brief titles or descriptions, which I present here.²³

I (1): *Panegyricus Plinii Secundi Traiano Augusto*—1 September 100 CE. This is Pliny the Younger's speech of thanks to the emperor Trajan for the "suffect consulship" that Pliny held that year (*consules suffecti* were "additional" or "substitute" consuls).

II (12): *Panegyricus Latini Pacati Drepani dictus Theodosio*—389 CE. A panegyric celebrating Theodosius' victory over the usurper Magnus Maximus (388). Latinus Pacatus Drepanius was from the area around Bordeaux (then Burdigala). He went on to become *proconsul Africae* (390) and *comes rei privatae* (393).

III (11): *Gratiarum actio Mamertini de consulatu suo Iuliano imperatori*—1 January 362 CE. A speech of thanks to the emperor Julian for the consulship, delivered in Constantinople. Flavius Claudius Mamertinus was a Gallic teacher of rhetoric, *comes sacrarum largitionum* (361), then praetorian prefect of Illyricum (from 361), and subsequently praetorian prefect of Italy (until 365).

IV (10): *Panegyricus Nazarii dictus Constantino imperatori*—1 March 321 CE. A panegyric celebrating the 15th anniversary of Constantine's accession (his *quinquennialia*) and the 5th anniversary of the appointment of his sons Crispus and Constantine II as *caesares*, delivered in Rome in the emperor's absence (but the sons may have been present). Nazarius was a rhetorician from Bordeaux.

²² C. E. V. Nixon, Barbara Saylor Rodgers, and R. A. B. Mynors. *In praise of later Roman emperors: The Panegyric Latini: Introduction, translation, and historical commentary with the Latin text of R.A.B. Mynors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

²³ Details (including the years in which the panegyrics were delivered) are taken from Rees (2012, 24) and Nixon and Rodgers (2015).

V (8): *Incipit primus dictus Constantino*—311 CE. A panegyric on Constantine I, delivered in Trier. The anonymous panegyrist expresses gratitude to the emperor for tax relief granted to the city of Augustodunum (present-day Autun, central France).

VI (7): *Incipit secundus*—probably 310 CE (after Maximian’s death). A panegyric on Constantine I, delivered in Trier by an anonymous panegyrist to mark the anniversary of the city’s foundation.

VII (6): *Incipit tertius*—307 CE (probably September). A panegyric on Constantine I and his co-ruler Maximian, delivered by an anonymous orator in Trier on the occasion of the marriage of Constantine to Maximian’s daughter Fausta.²⁴

VIII (4): *Incipit quartus*—spring 297 CE. A panegyric on the emperor Constantius I, probably delivered in Trier, perhaps to mark Britain’s rejoining the empire.²⁵ The anonymous panegyrist was from Autun.

IX (5): *Incipit quintus*—298 CE.²⁶ In this panegyric, the rhetorician Eumenius asks an unnamed governor (*consularis*) of a Gallic province (*Lugdunensis Prima?*) for financial support to restore a school (after the war with the bagaudae) in Autun, his hometown. Eumenius was secretary (*magister memoriae*) to the emperor Constantius I. Therefore, strictly speaking, this is not really a panegyric.

X (2): *Incipit sextus*—21 April 289 CE. A panegyric on the emperor Maximian, delivered on the occasion of the “birthday” of the city of Rome (*natalis urbis Romae*), probably in Trier (which was Maximian’s residence in 286–293). The author is a certain Mamertinus, apparently a teacher of rhetoric, but not the same as the author of Panegyric III.

XI (3): *Item eiusdem magistri Mamertini genethliacus Maximiani Augusti*—291 CE. A panegyric on the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, delivered in Trier on the occasion of the latter’s birthday. This panegyric was written by the same author as the previous one.

²⁴ Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 184) date it to September.

²⁵ Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 105–106) allow for 298. Barnes (2014, 39) is certain the date was 1 March 297.

²⁶ Nixon and Rodgers (2015, 148) are by no means so sure about this date, noting that it “can be no earlier than 297 and may be as late as 299 or even later”.

XII (9): *Hic dictus est Constantino filio Constantii*—313 CE. A panegyric on Constantine I, delivered in Trier during the games held by Constantine following his victory over Maxentius.

APPENDIX C: THE MIGHT OF THE ROMAN ARMY DURING THE TETRARCHY AND THE CONSTANTINIAN DYNASTY

I.

During the Principate, the number of legions kept nudging upwards, rising from 25 on the death of the emperor Augustus to 27 during the reign of Caligula, 29 under Vespasian, and 30 under Domitian. We have already seen (in Chapter 2) how Septimius Severus increased the number of legions to 33. David Potter, assuming that legions during the Severan dynasty were 5,000 men strong, arrived at a figure of 165,000 legionaries. This is likely to be an underestimate, because a legion could actually have had anywhere between five and six thousand men.²⁷ Potter added to that number of legionaries about 250 cohorts of *auxilia* (another 125–150,000 men),²⁸ plus around 10,000 praetorians (and other military and paramilitary forces in Rome) and roughly 40,000 sailors. All in all, then, by the end of his reign, Septimius Severus could perhaps count on

²⁷ Goldsworthy (2009, 59) puts the number at 5,000–5,500; Campbell (2008b, 124) calculates that legions during the Principate period had exactly 5,280 men; Jones (1964, 680) estimates that there were around 6,000.

²⁸ Campbell (2008b, 111–114) has counted over 400 auxiliary units during the Severan dynasty (although he expresses uncertainty about when these units existed). Of these, over 100 were responsible for protecting the Danube at this time (along with 12 legions), and another 80 covered the Eastern border from Asia Minor to Egypt (with 11 legions). An *auxilium* appears to have had 500 men.

approximately 350,000 men.²⁹ Incidentally, this was not even 1% of the population of the empire, as there may have been 58 million souls living here at the time.³⁰ Adrian Goldsworthy estimates that there were 350–375,000 men-in-arms during the Severan dynasty, though he is at pains to point out that this is only his calculation and that the actual numbers may have been somewhat lower.³¹ For our purposes, we will assume that the armed forces towards the end of the Principate had 350,000 men all told.

While the legions of the Principate numbered about 5,500 men, by the second half of the fourth century they had shrunk to only 1,000 or so. As Brian Campbell points out, this does not mean that the Roman legion was completely transformed under Diocletian; on the contrary, it must be assumed that at least part of the legions under Diocletian remained—initially anyway—the same size as before. Campbell refers to the practice in Diocletian’s time, when legions used to be stationed in up to six different places at once, so it would have made no sense to divide 1,000 men into detachments of several hundred legionaries.³² A. H. M. Jones reckoned that detachments (*vexillationes*) of 1,000 men were permanently hived off from the old legions under Diocletian and dispatched to different locations, and that this type of unit became the standard for the formation of new-type legions. Indeed, it is likely that the old legions started to be scaled down during the first tetrarchy, but this was a long process that was not completed until the second half of Constantine’s reign.

However, fragmenting the legions is no way to strengthen the army as a whole. Fortunately, we know that very many new units were created under Diocletian. By 305, the 33 Severan legions had more than doubled to at least 67, and it is likely that the number of *auxilia* had increased

²⁹ Williams (2000, 97) is in agreement.

³⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 125–126.

³¹ Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 39.

³² Campbell, “The Severan dynasty”, 124. For example, at one point legionaries from *legio III Diocletiana* were evidently stationed in four different places in Egypt; see the *Notitia Dignitatum* Or. XXVIII, 18 (Egypt); XXXI 31, 33 and 38 (Thebais). For a different view, see Goldsworthy (2009, 208).

in proportion to this.³³ Assuming that all the old legions had 6,000 men, and that all Diocletian's newly formed legions were a thousand men strong,³⁴ we arrive at a total of 232,000 men for the legions alone. Once we have included the *auxilia*, sailors, praetorians, and other military and paramilitary forces in Rome, that could take us to 400–450,000 men in the twilight of Diocletian's reign. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that this is only one of the possible answers to a question with a surfeit of variables.

The uncertainty surrounding the size of the 4th-century tetrarchic army has led to wide-ranging estimates by modern scholars. David Potter judged that the 4th-century army was either roughly the same size as or even smaller (!) than the army of the Severan dynasty, and that it numbered just 240–360,000 men.³⁵ Most scholars, however, assume that Diocletian actually increased the number of soldiers, though they vary considerably in their calculations. Averil Cameron concluded that Diocletian's army had “not much more than four hundred thousand” men, while according to Stephen Williams it had “over 500,000 men”.³⁶ A. D. Lee estimated the total number of soldiers in the early fourth-century army at 500,000 (and the population of the empire at 50 million).³⁷ Warren Treadgold believed that Diocletian increased troop numbers enormously, arguing that the Roman army had about 200,000 men in the Eastern half of the empire alone in around 235 and before 285, and that Diocletian increased this to some 250,000. There was subsequent modest growth under Constantine, who had about 280,000 men in the East in around 324. Treadgold deduces that, by 395, the Eastern Roman Empire's army numbered about 335,000 men.³⁸ A. H. M. Jones, focusing on the same period, estimated that there were approximately

³³ For a detailed discussion, see Campbell (2008, 122–123). Williams (2000, 97) arrived at different figures—he counted that “at the very least, the Tetrarchic armies had a grand total of 53 old and new legions”.

³⁴ Southern (2004, 156) observes that “it is a strong possibility that the newly created Diocletianic legions were only 1,000 strong, with the old legions remaining at their original strengths”.

³⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 457.

³⁶ Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, 35; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 97.

³⁷ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 77.

³⁸ Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 58–59.

350,000 soldiers in the Eastern Roman army (and 250,000 in the Western Roman army).³⁹ Jones and Treadgold thus assume steady growth, at least in the East. As is evident from the above, however, we can only resort to estimates.⁴⁰ On what sources are these calculations based?

Lactantius implies that Diocletian, by appointing three more emperors, also created three more armies; that is, there were now four times more soldiers than before.⁴¹ He even says that each of the tetrarchy's four emperors aspired to a "much larger" (*longe maiorem*) army than the independently ruling emperors before Diocletian. Even if we take the lowest possible estimate of the number of troops prior to Diocletian—perhaps a quarter of a million—as the basis for the calculation, we get a million men-in-arms, but if we use the much more likely basis of 350,000, we arrive at 1.4 million men. Needless to say, these figures are absurdly high, so Lactantius probably got carried away in his zeal. In all likelihood, his statement merely reflects the new reality that each of the tetrarchs now naturally had his own army.

The Byzantine historian Agathias observes that, in his time (under Justinian), the army had a paltry 150,000 men and was no longer capable of defending the vast East Roman Empire, whereas "under the earlier emperors" the empire had had 645,000 men at its disposal.⁴² The problem with this, of course, is that we do not know which "earlier emperors" are meant here (he is probably thinking of the fourth century, and perhaps specifically the Constantinian dynasty). The value of this account is further diminished by its polemical nature,⁴³ which may

³⁹ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 683.

⁴⁰ Estimates of the number of recruits needed to replenish the tetrarchic armies each year also vary widely: according to Williams (2000, 97), we are looking at 90,000 men, but Stephenson (2010, 98) suggests the figure was as low as 20,000.

⁴¹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 7, 2 (*tres enim participes regni sui fecit in quattuor partes orbe diviso et multiplicatis exercitibus, cum singuli eorum longe maiorem numerum militum habere contenderent, quam priores principes habuerant*).

⁴² Agathias V, 13, 7. Agathias' figure of 150,000 men would be plausible if he meant only the mobile army, but excluded the frontier troops, the *foederati*, the palace guard, the *bucellarii* (the personal guard in the service of military leaders), and the navy; see Treadgold (1995, 59–63).

⁴³ Agathias is critical of Justinian not just on account of his weak army, but also because he neglected much of the empire's defence capabilities later on in his reign. For example, in 559, the Kutrigur chieftain Zabergan was able to menace the suburbs of Constantinople with just 7,000 horsemen. See Cameron (1970, 125).

have compelled the Byzantine historian to exaggerate the size of the army “under the earlier emperors”.⁴⁴ Ultimately, Agathias literally says that “it would have been necessary” for Justinian’s empire, stretching from Spain to the Caucasus, to have had those 645,000 men at its disposal. Imperial defences were certainly stretched to the limit in the latter years of Justinian’s reign, but it would have been ludicrous to demand that the empire be protected by 645,000 men-at-arms at a time when surely half that number could have done the job. Maintaining such a sizeable army would have been ineffectual and, worse, would have been economically devastating for Justinian’s empire. Agathias’ estimate must be accepted for what it is: nothing but rhetorical hyperbole.

Agathias’ contemporary Joannes Lydus (i.e. John the Lydian) very briefly, but accurately, noted that under Diocletian the Roman army numbered 389,704 soldiers and 45,562 sailors, and that Constantine increased these numbers by tens of thousands after his conquest of the East (i.e. after 324).⁴⁵ These figures are so remarkably precise that it is tempting to think that Lydus (who held high state offices in Constantinople) copied them from some well-informed source. We must also take into account that the public servant Lydus, unlike Agathias, evidently had no reason to inflate his numbers.⁴⁶ The figure he has recorded looks like it pertains to a specific time in Diocletian’s reign, but which particular moment would that be? It may refer to the beginning of his reign (when the emperor, needing to know how many men he had at his disposal, would have commissioned an accurate census), to the tail end (when he was handing over the empire to the other *augusti*), or to 293 (when the formation of the four-man imperial college meant that the precise size of the armies needed to be ascertained before they could be divided). Warren Treadgold singles out the expression “under Diocletian”, which he takes to mean that Lydus is providing a figure for the beginning of Diocletian’s reign (284–285), i.e. the period before

⁴⁴ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 75.

⁴⁵ Ioannes Lydus, *De mensibus I*, 27. Lydus’ Greek also allows for a translation to the effect that “Constantine increased the army by so many tens of thousands”; that is, he doubled the number of soldiers in the Roman Empire after 324. Utterly impossible, all this could prove was how naive the scribe was. On the other hand, we cannot simply dismiss the exactness of the figures cited by Lydus for Diocletian’s army.

⁴⁶ Whitby, “The Army, c. 420–602”, 292; Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 75.

Diocletian chose his co-ruler.⁴⁷ However, Lydus also mentions that he is referring to “the whole Roman army”, so in reality we could be looking at any point in Diocletian’s reign. If we stick to our premise that the empire had 350,000 men in all kinds of arms during the late Principate, Lydus’ total of 435,266 can probably be linked to a time when the empire had been stabilised and was capable of offensive action—let’s assume the 290s. From then until the end of his reign, Diocletian could have increased his army to 450,000 soldiers, with Constantine subsequently adding even more troops (to cope with his very busy foreign policy, especially on the Danube and in the East).

Zosimus, writing sometime around the year 500, tells us that by 312 Constantine, having feverishly recruited troops even from “among the vanquished barbarians and Germani”, had command of 90,000 infantry and 8,000 cavalry in his fight with Maxentius, who had 170,000 infantry and 18,000 cavalry.⁴⁸ In fact, Zosimus accurately says that, after gathering this army, Constantine invaded Italy. This may not mean that he took every man with him, but it does indicate that the entire Western half of the empire, as controlled by both emperors, had 286,000 soldiers.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Zosimus relies entirely on the rhetorician Eunapius and is no stranger to exaggeration. In his account of the Battle of Strasbourg in 357, for example, Zosimus claims⁵⁰ that Julian slaughtered 60,000 Alamanni and that an equal number drowned in the Rhine. The much more dependable Ammianus Marcellinus attests that 6,000 Alamanni died on the battlefield and that an incalculable number were carried away by the river (with Roman casualties reported at a mere 247).⁵¹ While it would be rather simplistic to suggest that every figure given to us by

⁴⁷ Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 45.

⁴⁸ Zos. II, 15, 1–2.

⁴⁹ Češka (2000, 53) believes that Maxentius may well have had 188,000 men, but accords Constantine “only about 30,000” soldiers. Although Češka makes the reasonable assumption that half of Maxentius’ army was stationed in north-eastern Italy to counter a possible invasion by Licinius, this still implies that some 90,000 of Maxentius’ soldiers were in the vicinity of Rome, which would have meant that Constantine was outnumbered three to one at the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge. This is unlikely because Constantine, by then an experienced military commander, would have sought to avoid such unfavourable odds.

⁵⁰ Zos. III, 3, 3.

⁵¹ Amm. Marc. XVI, 12, 63 (*ex Alamannis vero sex milia corporum numerata sunt in campo constrata et inaestimabiles mortuorum acervi per undas fluminis ferebantur*).

Zosimus should be divided by ten, it does show that we need to exercise caution.

In Constantine's war with Maxentius, another source—independent of Zosimus and, better yet, contemporaneous—indicates how big both emperors' armies were in 312. In a panegyric on Constantine delivered at the games held by Constantine at Trier in 313, i.e. very soon after the emperor's victory over Maxentius, the unknown author lauds Constantine for marching “scarcely a quarter of his army” across the Alps to confront Maxentius' 100,000 troops; elsewhere in the same work, Constantine is said to have had fewer than 40,000 soldiers with him.⁵² That makes perfect sense. Maxentius' army in Italy may have been huge, beefed up by deserters from the failed invasions mounted by Severus and Galerius in 307. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the considerable forces that Constantine had to keep back in imperial outposts, especially Britain and Gaul, Maxentius did not have to leave many troops behind in Sicily and Africa. If Constantine did lead, say, 35,000 soldiers across the Alps, the overall army under his command may have totalled some 150,000 men, so in all there would have been close to a quarter of a million troops in the Western half of the empire. This seems to be a reasonable figure, with the added advantage that it comes from a contemporary source and a public speech at that.

What can we conclude from all this? Not all of the aforementioned five authors who have something to say about the greatness of the late Roman army are worthy of our trust. Lactantius and Agathias are pushing their own political agenda, while Zosimus clings to Eunapius, a rhetorician who was plainly no stranger to hyperbole. Lydus' observation that the empire had 435,266 soldiers under Diocletian is consistent with the Panegyric of 313, which suggests that the empire as a whole had about half a million men-at-arms in the early fourth century. We can therefore surmise that the empire may have had about 450,000 soldiers at the end of the first tetrarchy, and perhaps somewhat more under Constantine.

⁵² *Pan. Lat.* XII (9), 3, 3 (*vix enim quarta parte exercitus contra centum milia armorum hostium Alpes transgressus es*); 5, 1–2 (*Alexander [...] numquam tamen maiores quadraginta milium copias duxit [...] tu vero etiam minoribus copiis bellum multo maius aggressus es*).

II.

To better understand the difficulties inherent in the numerical data served up by our sources, we should examine the numbers of soldiers reported to have fought in battles during the late tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty. In 313, there was a showdown between the last two tetrarchs of the East, Licinius and Maximinus Daia. Maximinus, we are told, had 70,000 troops at his disposal, while Licinius could barely muster 30,000 in time. Nevertheless, Maximinus Daia was defeated in Thrace on 30 April 313. Half of his army fell in battle; the rest fled or surrendered. That makes 35,000 dead. Licinius' losses are unknown.⁵³ At the Battle of Cibalae in 316, during the first war between Licinius and Constantine, Licinius suffered 20,000 casualties, mostly infantry.⁵⁴ By the second war with Licinius in 324, Constantine is said to have raised a force of 200 warships, more than 2,000 transport ships, 120,000 infantry, and 10,000 cavalry. Licinius had 150,000 infantry and 15,000 cavalry.⁵⁵ Zosimus informs us, rather later, that "about 34,000" of Licinius' men fell at the Battle of Adrianople (3 July). He then proceeded to lose another 5,000 in the naval Battle of the Hellespont. Finally, at the Battle of Chrysopolis (18 September), "barely 30,000" of Licinius' remaining 130,000 men escaped with their lives.⁵⁶ If Zosimus is to be believed, this would mean that Licinius lost 139,000 soldiers during that war.⁵⁷

These figures are quite obviously erroneous, at least as far as the number of the fallen is concerned. If they were true, the Roman army as a whole would have lost roughly 200,000 soldiers in a 11-year time span (313–324). This would have been equal to anything between a third and a half of the entire Roman Empire's military. In point of fact, the army probably did lose such a high number of soldiers in that time, but not, for the most part, on the battlefield. Tens of thousands of men retired from

⁵³ Lact. *mort. pers.* 45, 7–8; 47, 4.

⁵⁴ *Origo* 5,16 (*Licinio XXXV milia peditum et equitum fuere: Constantinus XX milia peditum [et] equitum duxit. Caesis post dubium certamen Licinianis viginti peditum milibus et equitum ferratorum parte Licinius cum magna parte equitatus noctis auxilio pervolavit ad Sirmium*).

⁵⁵ Zos. II, 22, 1–2.

⁵⁶ Zos. II, 22, 7; 24; 26, 3.

⁵⁷ The *Origo* (5, 27) revises this to say that 25,000 of Licinius' soldiers fell at Chrysopolis.

the army each year. Then, there were losses due to desertions, diseases, and wounds. Finally, there were indeed some killed in battle.

From the later period of the Constantinian dynasty, similarly high losses are reported by the late Byzantine author Zonaras at the Battle of Mursa, fought between Constantius II and Magnentius on 28 September 351. Constantius is said to have had about 80,000 men, losing about 30,000 in the battle, while Magnentius apparently suffered 24,000 casualties out of his army of 36,000 soldiers. Total fatalities therefore came to 54,000.⁵⁸

In relation to these figures, it is worth noting that, broadly speaking, the logistical difficulties of armies going to war in the fourth century generally capped participation at about 15–30,000 men. When the emperor Julian marched into Persia with an unusually large 65,000-man army in 363, its sheer scale evidently forced him to split it into three streams. Logistical issues aside, there were strategic reasons why it was inadvisable to commit overly large contingents of the half-million-strong Roman army: most troops were needed to guard the frontiers. The notion that Constantine would have taken 130,000 troops with him to fight Licinius in 324, as reported by Zosimus, is implausible, even though he may have had double that number at his disposal—as we have seen, he and Maxentius together probably had 250,000 men; after 12 years, the losses from the battles in Italy would have long since been replaced, and after 316, moreover, Constantine controlled most of the Balkans. However, the situation on the Rhine and Danube frontiers (not to mention Britain and Africa) undoubtedly prevented him from mustering so many troops for the Eastern campaign in 324, as garrisons had to be maintained in all sorts of places.

⁵⁸ Zon. XII, 8.

APPENDIX D: CONSTANTINE'S VISIONS

I. The "Christian Vision"

As Constantine's army was approaching Rome in October 312, there was one striking detail that made it stand out from all other marching Roman armies, past or contemporary: a peculiar emblem on its shields. During the campaign, Constantine—in a sudden fit of enlightenment or inspiration—had ordered his soldiers to paint the monogram of Christ on their shields. What prompted him to do this, what kind of monogram it was, and what change of religious orientation Constantine was probably experiencing at the time are recounted by the ancient authors. Let's take a look at these accounts in chronological order.

Two are from contemporaries of Constantine (neither of whom was in Italy at the time); the others are from the fifth century or later and are based on one of those two reports. All are by Christian writers, mostly authors of various ecclesiastical histories.

The first testimony is provided by Lactantius, who, in his account of Constantine's Italian campaign, says that "Constantine was commanded in his sleep to have the heavenly sign of God painted on his shields, and thus to wage battle. He did as he was commanded, and marked the shields with the sign of Christ **by means of a rotated letter X, curved**

at the top”.⁵⁹ The translation of the highlighted portion is problematic and allows for multiple interpretations. One possibility is that the monogram looked like a letter “X” rotated 90 degrees, its upper arm having been elongated into an arc, resembling the letter “P”. Taken together, we would read the monogram as a ligature of the letters “XP”, but in the Latin alphabet this means nothing at all to us (excepting one older version of Windows). In the Greek alphabet, on the other hand, this gives us the pairing of chi and rho, the first two letters of the word “Christos”, and thus supposedly denotes Christ.⁶⁰ It is puzzling why the Christian God would send Constantine, in Italy, an obscure signal in the Greek alphabet in his sleep, but dreams are hardly a realm of logic. The important thing is that Constantine (who knew Greek) understood the message.

There is no reason to doubt that Constantine had such a dream. In the circumstances, the emperor may indeed have found inspiration in a dream, acted on it, and later mentioned it to Lactantius when he entrusted him with the education of his son Crispus in Trier. Besides, he must have got the idea of the shields from somewhere, and a dream is as good a place as any other. When Constantine had been in Britain or Gaul sometime earlier, he may have seen similar markings, which became imprinted on his memory and later resurfaced in a dream. Lactantius’ account here is plausible and believable. Eusebius, on the other hand, is far more contentious.

Eusebius describes Constantine’s Italian campaign in two of his works. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, he makes no mention of any sign or miracle—for him the only wonder is that Maxentius drowned in the river,⁶¹ but in his later *Life of Constantine* he cooks up a completely new story that bears very little resemblance to Lactantius’ account. Before we delve further, we should remind ourselves of the time these works were written. Eusebius evidently wrote the ninth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, which deals with the Italian campaign, as early as 313. Lactantius was probably writing

⁵⁹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 44, 5 (*Commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut caeleste signum dei notare in scutis atque ita proelium committeret. Fecit, ut iussus est, et transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo Christum in scutis notat*).

⁶⁰ Alternatives have been proposed. Drake (2000, 201–203) wonders whether it may have been a staurogram, i.e. a ligature of the letters tau and rho forming a simple cross with the top stretched into an arch, but in this case the significance would be purely graphic as the superposition of tau and rho is only meant to depict Jesus on the cross.

⁶¹ Euseb. *HE IX*, 9.

his own work in 315. Significantly, in the *Oration of Emperor Constantine to the Assembly of Saints* (*Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum*), presumably written sometime around 315,⁶² Constantine himself makes not the slightest allusion to any revelation or extraordinary event dating from the time of the campaign against Maxentius (in fact, he does not even mention the campaign).

Eusebius did not begin his *Life of Constantine* until 25 years after the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, i.e. after Constantine's death in 337. The backdrop to Eusebius' account in his *Life* is Constantine's concern about which god to turn to for help in the coming war with Maxentius. As far as the emperor was concerned, considerations about his number of troops were less important than his conviction that he would achieve nothing without divine help, but would be invincible with it. It was also clear to him that Severus and Galerius had floundered when they marched against Maxentius "with a multitude of gods". He finally decided that only the god venerated by his father Constantius should be worshipped.⁶³ "And so the emperor began to pray to this god, whom he begged and implored to reveal to him which god he was, and to assist him with his outstretched right hand in the present situation. And while he was thus praying fervently, the most wonderful divine sign appeared to him. The description of this sign would not be easy to accept had it been reported by another person. But since the victorious emperor himself told this story, long after the event, to us who are writing this, and who have been privileged to enjoy the emperor's company and favour, and since he confirmed his account with oaths, who could doubt this testimony, especially as the period that followed has borne out its truth? He said that at about noon, just as the day was tipping into its second half, he saw with his own eyes a cross-shaped triumphal sign made of light in the sky above the sun, and on it an inscription: by means of this shall I be victorious. Amazement at this wonder seized him and the whole army accompanying him on his campaign somewhere, who also witnessed this miracle".⁶⁴

Eusebius continues: "He also told me that he himself had entertained doubts about the meaning of this sign, and pondered it at length, until

⁶² Though it could just as likely have been drawn up 10 years later (see Chapter 1).

⁶³ Euseb. *VC* I, 27. For more on the religious preferences of Constantine's father, see Chapter 6.

⁶⁴ Euseb. *VC* I, 28.

night fell. Then, as he slept, the god appeared to him with the same sign the emperor had seen earlier in the sky, and commanded him to make a likeness of this sign which he had seen in the sky, and to use it as protection in all clashes with his enemies. And as soon as the emperor arose in the morning, he called his friends together and told them about this revelation. Then he summoned the goldsmiths and craftsmen, sat down among them, and described to them the shape of the sign he had seen. And he bade them make it of gold and precious stones. I had the opportunity to see this form of the sign myself.⁶⁵

The differences between the accounts by Lactantius and Eusebius are numerous and substantial. The most important is what type of vision Constantine had. Lactantius describes a purely personal experience (a dream), Eusebius an event in the open air, in broad daylight, and with a crowd of eyewitnesses. The second different perspective concerns what Constantine was actually supposed to see: according to Lactantius, he saw a private puzzle consisting of a pair of Greek letters; Eusebius, on the other hand, says he saw a very obvious “cross-shaped victory sign”. The third aspect is the timing of the event: in Lactantius’ version, it evidently occurred the night before—or at any rate in the run-up to—the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge; according to Eusebius, it happened when Constantine was still planning his invasion and was not in Italy at all, but on a completely different campaign (Eusebius leaves us in the dark as to where, describing it nebulously by the word “somewhere”). Was Eusebius being deliberately vague, or did he simply not know? But how could he not know, when the source of his information was the emperor himself, who surely knew where he and his troops were at that moment?

The fourth problem is how along after the event the narrators wrote their accounts. Although Lactantius was not in Italy in 312, he recorded the events of the Italian campaign just two or three years later (probably in Trier in 315), most likely by drawing on eyewitness testimony. Eusebius, on the other hand, never included his account of the vision in his *Ecclesiastical History*, despite repeatedly editing this work (see Chapter 1). When he began writing his *Life of Constantine* in 337, he used his *Ecclesiastical History* as a guide. If Constantine’s revelation really did play such an important role in his victory, why had Eusebius not later enriched his *History* with an account of this vision? It might be argued, of course, that

⁶⁵ Euseb. *VC* I, 29–30.

Eusebius had limited access to information from the West before 325, and that Constantine may not have told him the story of the revelation until many years later, perhaps in 336 when Eusebius was in Constantinople to attend the celebrations marking 30 years of Constantine's reign (the *tricennalia*).⁶⁶ But even in the speech he made on this very occasion, on 25 July 336 in the imperial palace in Constantinople, Eusebius mentions no such thing. Why? Probably because the tale had yet to be spun at this time. It was only subsequent to Constantine's death, less than a year later, that Eusebius mustered the courage to come up with and include his account of the revelation in his *Life of Constantine*, which then inspired other ecclesiastical historians to take up the story and run with it. By that time, too, few people who had taken part in Constantine's Italian campaign in 312 were still alive; fewer still would have had the opportunity to read Eusebius' story, and we can round up the number who would have dared to speak out against it to a tidy zero.

The above differences in the accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius have led modern scholars to take extremely diverse views on the matter. Some, for all their reservations, prefer Eusebius' report⁶⁷; there are even those who cling to it like limpets.⁶⁸ Others, more inclined to Lactantius, point out the biggest chink in Eusebius' armour: if the phenomenon had been witnessed by an entire army, why did the event not become more widely known?⁶⁹ Eusebius is the only contemporary source to describe the revelation (and, again, we need to remember that Eusebius himself was not present at the event and did not describe Constantine's vision until a quarter of a century later). In the fifth century, it formed a basis for other ecclesiastical writers, who—indulging their imaginations—polished

⁶⁶ Cameron and Hall, *Life of Constantine*, 204.

⁶⁷ Potter (2004, 359) clearly distrusts Eusebius, but acknowledges that he captures Constantine's spiritual development better than Lactantius, who makes Constantine a Christian before the battle had even begun by having the Christian God send him a last-minute sign ahead of the clash. Drake (2000, 204) is another to prefer Eusebius over Lactantius.

⁶⁸ These include Nicholson (2000) and Odahl (2013, 105), the latter basically just paraphrasing Eusebius.

⁶⁹ According to Pohlsander (2004, 24), Lactantius' account is "by far the more believable". Stephenson (2010, 188) acknowledges that Constantine's vision, as rendered by Eusebius, may have been a "pious fiction".

and embellished it by adding their own details.⁷⁰ No other sources on Constantine, whether pagan or religiously non-partisan (Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, the *Panegyrici Latini*, the *Epitome*, the *Origo*, and Zosimus) or Christian (Jerome, Orosius), know anything about any revelation. All the more reason, then, to eye Eusebius' account with grave suspicion.

II. The "Pagan Vision"

Some scholars, perhaps to save Eusebius (or Constantine) from being labelled a "liar", identify Constantine's vision with another revelation that he was said to have experienced not with the whole army in 312, but alone and two years earlier. We have seen how 310 was a particularly important year for Constantine. His previously efficacious political manoeuvring in the crumbling tetrarchy, or rather tetrarchies, abruptly gave way to crisis when his father-in-law Maximian revolted. Although quickly quelled, this challenge nevertheless exposed Constantine to the danger that he could be dispossessed of the legitimacy that, in the West, he had gained only thanks to Maximian (in the East he was still considered nothing more than a "son of emperors" [*filii Augustorum*] at this time). Hence, the speech delivered soon after in Trier in 310, which, with Constantine's permission, informed all those present that Constantine was a relative of the emperor Claudius II (see Appendix A) and explained that he had recently acquired a new heavenly protector: Apollo. The dramatic circumstances and tense situation in which the emperor had latched on to this god were similar to the final hours before the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge.⁷¹

We have seen (in Chapter 6) that Constantine originally left most of his army with Maximian in southern Gaul, taking only a smaller force to battle the Franks on the Rhine.⁷² He was forced to divert some of those troops south with all haste to crush his father-in-law's rebellion. Having made Maximian kill himself, he quickly headed north out of Marseilles to continue his war against the Franks. He doubled the speed of the march (*geminatum itineris laborem*) on the way after hearing that the Franks, taking advantage of the emperor's absence and the fact that only

⁷⁰ See, for example, Socr. *HE* I, 2; Soz. *HE* I, 3; Philost. *HE* I, 6. Eusebius' story is also retold by the late Byzantine author Zonaras (XIII, 1, 3).

⁷¹ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 2 (Claudius II); 21, 3-7 (Apollo).

⁷² Lact. *mort. pers.* 29, 3.

a weak garrison remained on the Rhine, had made an incursion across the river. However, Constantine's anxiety over the realm, said the panegyrist, lasted but a single night (*unius noctis cura*), for just as he had surprised Maximian by his rapid movement south, so now he startled the Franks by his swift return. On the following day, he received further news telling him that the barbarians were retreating back across the Rhine. (How the barbarians came to know that Constantine was on his way back is unclear, but he probably sent a courier to the Rhine with a message.) Constantine could breathe a little more easily. The speed at which he covered the ground was a feat in itself: from Marseilles to Trier it is over 800 km, to Cologne nearly 1,000 km, and although the via *Agrippa* from Arles to Cologne would have smoothed the path, there is no way he could have traversed that distance in under 30 days. The army was tired (*fessus exercitus*), as was its leader. Now, however, Constantine decided to slow down and move off the via *Agrippa*. On the approach to Neufchâteau, probably in Nijon, he changed route to Reims, and after about 30 km, he reached the present-day town of Grand (in the Vosges department in north-eastern France), where there was a famous temple of Apollo, "the most beautiful in all the world" if our orator is to be believed. Constantine made a stop here, and it was either in or by the temple that "his" Apollo, accompanied by the goddess Victoria, appeared to him and offered him a laurel wreath, long life, and world rule (*Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria coronas tibi laureas offerentem*). The details are vague, especially when the speaker says that Constantine recognised himself in the form of Apollo (*vidisti teque in illius specie recognovisti*).⁷³

This "pagan vision", as it is commonly called among scholars, which Constantine had a full two years before the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, may have been a mere hallucination caused by the extreme physical exhaustion from such a long and arduous journey. That or a fabrication. What is important, however, is how it could be mined for propaganda. In the panegyric, Apollo serves the same purpose as the kinship with Claudius—he was meant to sanctify Constantine's claim to world domination and, more generally, to shore up his position now that it had been rattled.⁷⁴ What does this have to do with the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge? Nothing. But its relevance in this context is that some derive the

⁷³ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), 21, 2–3.

⁷⁴ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 215.

“Christian vision” from the pagan one; that is, they maintain that what Eusebius describes to us actually belongs to the year 310 and is Constantine’s personal recollection of the event as described to the author of the panegyric, who announced it to the world the same year. Subsequently, on the eve of the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, this two-year-old vision was somehow “Christianised”, and then, 25 years down the line, retold by Eusebius. Peter Weiss, who first came up with this hypothesis, explained Constantine’s 310 vision as a physical, optical phenomenon known as the halo effect. This is caused by the reflection or passage of sun or moon rays through tiny ice crystals in the atmosphere. The result is something that, if you squint, might look like one or more crosses.⁷⁵ The one unquestionable advantage of this hypothesis is that it gets rid of the vision of 312—and with it all those inconvenient witnesses at the Mulvian Bridge (where there really was nothing unearthly, just a bloody battle)—because Constantine was probably alone for the vision in 310. On the other hand, the drawback of a lack of witnesses is that we have no choice but take Constantine’s word for it that he was telling the truth both to the author of the 310 panegyric and to Eusebius a quarter of a century later. Another problem with this hypothesis is that, while halo effects are fairly common, they do not sit very well with the panegyric author’s description of them (and do not fit in with Eusebius’ account at all). Why would a highly distinctive atmospheric phenomenon occur at the very moment when Constantine needed it most? Direct evidence is non-existent and indirect evidence is flimsy at best.

Barnes and others were very much taken by Weiss’ hypothesis.⁷⁶ Then, there are the likes of Pohlsander, who concedes that there may have been a halo effect, but thinks it more likely that no phenomenon at

⁷⁵ Weiss, “The Vision of Constantine”. This is a 2003 translation of an article that was first published in German in 1993. For details and a discussion of the Weiss solution, including the history of its acceptance or rejection, see Barnes (2014, 74–80).

⁷⁶ Barnes, *Constantine*, 74–80; Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 278–280; Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 67–72; even—rather reluctantly—Stephenson, *Constantine*, 188–189.

all occurred. Even more sceptical is Clauss, who regards any explanation of the Emperor's vision based on astronomical phenomena as merely "amusing". The complete agnostics are fronted by Pat Southern.⁷⁷

If we reject completely Eusebius' account and the pagan vision presented by the panegyric of 310, that does not mean that, by default, Lactantius is to be believed implicitly. Pat Southern, for example, argues quite reasonably that if Constantine's dream came the night before the battle (as Lactantius seems to imply), where did the army suddenly get so much paint? And would it not have been more sensible to let the soldiers get a good night's sleep before the battle?⁷⁸ That is not to say that we should accuse Constantine of lying. For all we know, perhaps he really did feel he saw something in the sky (or at the temple) in 312 (or 310). He was on a military campaign, which is always an exhausting endeavour, so maybe he was tired, sleep-deprived, or dehydrated; a mild hallucination or optical illusion would have been natural in the circumstances.⁷⁹ And no one around him would have dared contradict his conviction that he had seen something that was not there. Pohlsander reminds us that we should not view Constantine purely as a coldly calculating politician; conversion to Christianity brought Constantine no benefits in 312 that mere toleration of Christianity could not provide, and Christians, after all, were still just a minority, especially in the West. Whatever Constantine's spiritual experience before the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, his bishops explained it to him as the presence and favour of the Christian God.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 23–24; Clauss, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, 35. Cf. Southern (2004, 175) ("The authenticity of Constantine's Christian vision before the battle will never be proven").

⁷⁸ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, 175.

⁷⁹ On the causes of hallucinations, see, for example, Teeple, R. C., Caplan, J. P., & Stern, T. A. (2009). Visual hallucinations: Differential diagnosis and treatment. *Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 11(1), 26–32, available online at <https://doi.org/10.4088/pcc.08r00673> [accessed 10 March 2020].

⁸⁰ Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 23–24.

APPENDIX E: THE YEAR OF DIOCLETIAN'S DEATH

The year of Diocletian's death poses a chronological problem. Diocletian's contemporary Lactantius, who probably wrote his work on persecutors in 315 (see Chapter 1), says that Diocletian starved himself to death (*fame atque angore confectus est*) after the deaths of Maximian (310) and Galerius (311), but before the death of Maximinus (313), and probably also before Constantine's invasion of Italy (312). According to Lactantius, Diocletian died at some point after likenesses of Maximian had been destroyed everywhere by order of Constantine; as this Western *augustus* tended to be depicted together with Diocletian, there would have been no choice but to destroy the likenesses of Diocletian at the same time.⁸¹ And since the dead Maximian did not suffer *damnatio memoriae* until sometime around the end of 311 (see Chapter 6), it would seem that this was also the year in which Diocletian died. Moreover, another source (see below) has even preserved for us the exact date of his death—3 December—so it would be tempting to assume that our chronological job is done and that Diocletian died on 3 December 311.

And yet the *Epitome de Caesaribus* says that Diocletian was invited by Constantine and Licinius to the wedding of Licinius and Constantia, Constantine's sister, in Milan (he declined the invitation, citing his old

⁸¹ Lact. *mort. pers.* 42.

age). This would mean that he must have been alive when, or at least shortly before, the wedding took place (in February 313). Indeed, he may have lived for several months afterwards,⁸² as the *Epitome* goes on to state that, following his abdication, Diocletian spent another “nearly nine years” (*prope novem*) as a private person, which would again point to late 313 or early 314. Finally, the cause of death provides another clue: Diocletian is said to have committed suicide out of fear of Constantine and Licinius. After he had refused to come to the wedding in Milan, they reportedly made threats against him and accused him of having sided with Maxentius and Maximinus. The old emperor decided that, rather than waiting to be murdered, he would drink poison. This mention of the victory over Maxentius and Maximinus takes us to a time after July 313. In the light of the above, the date of 3 December 313 springs to mind.

Another significant factor seems to be the *Epitome*'s indication that Diocletian lived to be 68, which would point to 245 as the likely year of the emperor's birth. Many modern scholars agree with this dating.⁸³ It is worth noting John Malalas' observation that Diocletian died at the age of 72, but this later Byzantine author is notorious for getting his chronology wrong.⁸⁴ Socrates Scholasticus places Diocletian's death at the time of Constantine's victory over Maxentius and his treaty with Licinius, which may again mean that Diocletian died in 313 or shortly thereafter.⁸⁵

Jerome complicates matters by citing the year 316 in his *Chronicle*, and the same tradition was probably being followed by Zosimus when he says that Diocletian died three years after the third consulship of Constantine and Licinius, i.e. in 316.⁸⁶ The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* goes further, pinpointing 3 December 316. However, this particular work often commits chronological errors in its years (see, for example, the

⁸² *Epitome* 39, 7. Nakamura (2003) deduces from this information in the *Epitome* that Diocletian died before the actual wedding (on 3 December 312). However, this does not follow from the *Epitome*, and, furthermore, it assumes that Diocletian received the invitation to the wedding sometime in November 312, which seems too early, since Constantine had only just triumphed over Maxentius on 28 October.

⁸³ Potter (2004, 280) and Barnes (1982, 32) conclude that he was born around 244, but cf. *PLRE I*, 254 (“possibly born in 247/8”).

⁸⁴ See Malalas XII, 44. A comparison made by Barnes (1982, 46) shows that Malalas is almost always off by a few years when he states the years of birth of the tetrarchy's emperors.

⁸⁵ Socr. *HE I*, 2, 10.

⁸⁶ Zos. II, 8, 1.

Battle of Cibalae in Chapter 7), though there is no reason to doubt the precise dates (i.e. the day and month) given for various events.

If we were to accept the hypothesis that the last three sources mentioned (Jerome, the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, and Zosimus) are based on an erroneous tradition, and if we consider that Lactantius' work was probably not written later than 315, the possible years have to be narrowed down to 311–314. Basically, we have to pick from one of two groups of dates, depending on whether we follow Lactantius or the *Epitome*: 311/312 or 313/314. Since the *Epitome* is broadly a reliable source and often gives detailed information about the reigns of emperors, how long they lived, how they died, and other details, perhaps we should yield to it and set the most likely date of Diocletian's death as 3 December 313. Modern historians' estimates reflect this dilemma and usually offer a range from 311 to 313.⁸⁷

All that remains is for us to reflect on Lactantius' account of the end of Diocletian's life. Considering the nature and purpose of Lactantius' *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, it would have been unthinkable for him to let Diocletian die peacefully in his sleep. Even so, starving oneself to death is an unorthodox method of suicide. Cassius Dio recorded that the empress Julia Domna went down this route after the death of her son Caracalla (in 217), but he also added that the main cause of her death, which her fasting only hastened, was terminal breast cancer.⁸⁸ In a healthy individual, refusing food leads to death after approximately 10 weeks, but it is a very painful way to go and it is hard to imagine that Diocletian would have chosen it.⁸⁹ The poison mentioned by the

⁸⁷ Barnes (2014, 170) and Odahl (2005, 83) give the year 311; Pohlsander (2004, 17) confines himself to the range 311–313; Potter was initially (2004, 356) undecided as to whether it was “311 or 313”, but later (2013, 308) leans towards 311; Corcoran (2000, 7) tentatively suggests December 312; Williams (2000, 200) is quite sure it was 312; Kuhoff (2001, 934) favours “313 or 314”. Some even attach an exact date: Leadbetter (2009, 243) says 3 December 311; Lenski (2007b, 87, note 78) offers “probably 3 December 312”; Kienast (1996, 267), though with certain misgivings, cites 3 December 313; Češka (2000, 55) insists it was 3 December 316.

⁸⁸ Dio LXXVIII, 23.

⁸⁹ This applies to death by starvation diet, but with fluid intake. Without fluid, of course, death comes much sooner (and is even more painful). However, death would then be more likely to be caused by dehydration, and Lactantius writes only of the refusal of food (*nec cibum capiens*).

Epitome is much more likely. Furthermore, we are left to ask how Lactantius could have known what was going on in Salona at the time. At most, he could have heard news that the emperor was wasting away before everyone's eyes, and then filled in the dots himself. We already know (see Chapter 6) that, after Galerius' death, Diocletian's daughter Valeria refused Licinius' protection and went to Maximinus instead. Which did her little good, as Maximinus condemned her and her mother Prisca to exile. Diocletian, from his palace, repeatedly pleaded with Maximinus to allow Valeria to come to him, but in vain. He is said, in the end, to have sent "a relative of his who had great power in the army" (*cognatum suum quendam, militarem ac potentem virum*).⁹⁰ As can be seen, Lactantius is well informed of these messages and even deliberately withholds the name of the important officer or general. Instead of death by starvation, then, what we may have here is the gradual weakening of the body of a nearly 70-year-old man who is suffering from depression and a loss of appetite due to old age, illness, loneliness, and a sense of helplessness at his failure to persuade Maximinus to allow his family to return. Bearing in mind that Diocletian appears to have been in generally good physical condition (the many military campaigns he personally led attest to this, and his delight in growing vegetables also suggests a certain sprightliness), it would certainly have been possible to survive in such mental and physical agony for some time. And Diocletian may have delayed suicide in the hope that he would get to see his daughter and wife after all. Both women successfully went into hiding after Licinius' victory, and it was only 15 months after Maximinus' death—perhaps in the autumn of 314—that they were discovered and executed. Before then—perhaps by the second half of 313—Diocletian may have stopped receiving news of them and gradually lost hope that they were still alive, thus dissipating any remaining will to live. In this situation, poison would have been his deliverance.

⁹⁰ Lact. *mort. pers.* 41.

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INDEX OF NAMES

Note: This index includes the names of emperors, caesares, usurpers, members of the “extended tetrarchic family” and important or frequently mentioned personalities of the Roman empire in the years 193–337 CE, in particular the praetorian prefects (here labelled simply as prefects). Furthermore, ancient authors are included (if mentioned in the text, not in the footnotes), as well as foreign rulers, Germanic warlords, selected bishops and several gods. The Armenian kings are not included, since their identification is often disputed (see Chapter 9). This list also excludes modern authors and Constantine himself, whose names occurs too frequently in the text.

- A**
- Abantus (or Amandus) (commander), 155, 320
- Ablabius (prefect), 344–346, 399
- Achilleus (usurper), 26, 135, 183, 184
- Adventus (prefect), 62, 63, 251
- Aelianus (usurper), 104
- Aemilianus (emperor), 96, 99, 100, 113
- Agathias (author), 422, 423, 425
- Alaric (Germanic warlord), 38
- Alexander (bishop), 365, 367, 371
- Alexander the Great, 385
- Alica (Germanic warlord), 319, 322, 349
- Allectus (usurper), 179, 180, 189, 245, 246, 248, 262
- Ambrosius (bishop), 224
- Ammianus Marcellinus (author), 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 82, 93, 106, 107, 112, 117, 120, 122, 128, 180, 182, 185, 192, 211, 250, 255, 312, 329, 341, 345, 348, 377, 380, 401, 402, 424
- Anastasia (Constantine’s sister), 13, 235, 308, 397, 400, 402

Andonnoballus (Germanic warlord),
121

Annius Tiberianus (prefect), 345

Antiochus IV. (Seleucid king), 279

Antoninus Pius (emperor), 56, 69

Aper (prefect), 152, 188, 189

Apollo (god), 12, 214, 285, 300,
302, 360, 363, 434, 435

Arcadius (emperor), 34

Ardashir (Persian king), 73, 74, 76,
80

Ariaric (Germanic warlord), 375, 376

Aristobulus (prefect), 153, 154, 189,
192, 233, 235

Arius, 365–367, 369–373

Artabanus V. (Parthian king), 61–63,
73

Ascaricus (Germanic warlord), 267

Asclepiodotus (prefect), 180,
189–191, 235

Atharic (Germanic warlord), 254

Athanasius (bishop), 229, 369,
371–373, 384

Attalus (Germanic warlord), 98

Augustinus, Aurelius (author), 36

Augustus (emperor), 26, 34, 48, 54,
55, 65, 88, 89, 138, 169, 210,
325, 385, 419

Aurelianus (emperor), 124, 125, 129

Aurelius Victor, Sextus (author), 7,
26–30, 34, 74, 82, 84, 91, 93,
95, 96, 100, 106, 107, 117, 119,
120, 132, 136, 137, 144–147,
149, 150, 155, 176, 180, 211,
221, 226, 228, 229, 236, 240,
247, 252–254, 258, 261, 266,
270, 273, 274, 278, 290, 291,
317, 321, 328, 332, 335, 341,
377, 434

Aureolus (usurper), 102, 111–113,
116, 119, 120, 125

Auxentius (author), 381–384

Avidius Cassius (usurper), 102

B

Bahram I. (Persian king), 134, 180

Bahram II. (Persian king), 134, 156,
180

Balbinus (emperor), 78, 79, 400

Ballista (prefect), 101, 113

Bassianus (senator), 13, 400, 402

Bonitus (commander), 348

Bonosus (usurper), 147

C

Caecilianus (bishop), 303

Caesar, Gaius Julius, 89, 169, 385

Caligula (emperor), 143, 211, 419

Candidianus (son of Galerius), 173,
281, 299, 403

Cannaba(ude)s (Germanic warlord),
127, 128

Caracalla (emperor), 49–51, 53,
55–64, 72, 441

Carausius (usurper), 6, 157, 158, 160,
179, 180, 201, 248, 259, 262

Carinus (emperor), 33, 150–154,
189, 192, 223, 233

Carus (emperor), 2, 34, 130, 134,
150–154, 156, 189, 191, 211,
223, 232, 233, 389

Cassius Dio (author), 40, 46, 50, 51,
56–58, 60–64, 67, 73, 74, 441

Chnodomar (Germanic warlord), 27

Chrocus (Germanic warlord), 257,
258

Cicero (author), 290

Claudius (emperor), 34, 89, 119–125,
146, 151, 196

Claudius II. (emperor), 2, 3, 12, 37,
54, 58, 91, 97, 111, 112, 117,
122, 129, 139–141, 150, 221,
222, 278, 407–412, 434

- Clodius Albinus (emperor), 47–50, 53, 102, 248, 259
- Cniva (Germanic warlord), 90–94, 128
- Comazon (prefect), 65
- Commodus (emperor), 34, 39, 45, 46, 49, 54, 57, 68, 95, 110, 154, 211
- Constans (emperor), 313, 344, 345, 348, 397, 398, 401, 403, 404
- Constantia (Constantine's sister), 13, 235, 283, 284, 297, 307, 308, 316, 320, 321, 337, 368, 369, 397, 400, 402, 439
- Constantine II. (emperor), 294, 309–315, 326, 328, 344, 345, 374–376, 398, 401, 403, 404, 416
- Constantine VII. (emperor), 39
- Constantius (Constantine's brother), 308
- Constantius I. (tetrarch), 11, 26, 56, 168, 221, 224, 248, 257, 260, 278, 308, 348, 398, 399, 408, 410, 417
- Constantius II. (emperor), 20, 24, 27, 29, 259, 260, 311, 312, 323, 326, 328, 329, 344, 345, 354, 361, 383, 384, 401–405, 427
- Cornificia (daughter of Marcus Aurelius), 57
- Crispus (*caesar*), 309, 310
- Crocus (Germanic warlord), 254–259, 348
- Cybele (goddess), 67
- D**
- Dalmatius (*caesar*), 328, 379, 398, 399
- Dalmatius (Constantine's brother), 235, 308, 330, 344, 345, 397–399, 401, 403, 408
- Decius (emperor), 58, 76, 82–85, 87, 89–95, 98, 128, 154, 212, 215
- Dexippus (author), 37–40, 90, 92, 97, 118, 120
- Diadumenianus (*caesar*), 65
- Didius Julianus (emperor), 46, 48, 291
- Diocletian (tetrarch), 1–4, 9, 14, 20, 21, 32–34, 39, 40, 53, 85, 89, 97, 102, 111, 112, 114, 143, 149, 151–160, 167–172, 174–202, 204–216, 223, 230, 233, 235–243, 247, 260, 262, 263, 271–274, 276, 278, 282, 295, 299, 309, 314, 343, 346–349, 355–359, 362, 366, 386–390, 403, 412, 417, 420–425, 439–442
- Domitianus (emperor), 34, 35, 50, 53, 85, 125, 149, 211, 419
- Domitianus, Lucius Domitius (usurper), 182–184, 208
- Domitius Alexander (usurper), 266, 271, 275, 276, 286, 409
- Donatus (bishop), 304
- E**
- Elagabalus (deity), 64, 66, 68, 69, 141, 142
- Elagabalus (emperor), 34, 35, 63, 69, 70, 142
- Eudoxia (empress), 37
- Eunapius of Sardes (author), 37
- Eusebius of Caesarea (author), 20, 21, 366–368, 370–372, 384
- Eusebius of Nicomedia (bishop), 316, 367–373
- Eustathius (bishop), 367, 369, 371
- Eutropia (Constantine's sister), 172, 235, 278, 308, 397, 399
- Eutropius (author), 26, 28–31, 34, 36, 39, 40, 74, 82, 84, 93, 101,

103, 106, 113, 117, 124, 132,
136, 137, 144, 146, 149, 153,
155, 156, 186, 187, 222, 226,
228, 229, 232, 238, 253, 258,
261, 272–274, 286, 290, 291,
311, 313, 317, 329, 332,
335–337, 341, 410, 411, 434
Evagrius (author), 330–332
Evagrius (prefect), 344

F

Fausta (empress), 10, 13, 236, 237,
269, 270, 307, 309–313,
325–327, 330–338, 397, 402,
408, 417
Festus (author), 26, 28–31, 39, 81,
101, 113, 114, 128, 174, 181,
182, 379
Firmicus Maternus, Julius (author),
23, 24, 230
Florianus (emperor), 146, 150
Fraomarius (Germanic warlord), 255

G

Galba (emperor), 47
Galerius (tetrarch), 2, 3, 9–12, 14,
21, 26, 32, 86, 168, 171–178,
181–186, 188, 196–198, 210,
214, 215, 226, 230, 235, 236,
238–242, 245–248, 253,
260–263, 265, 266, 268–276,
278–284, 286, 288, 297–299,
304, 314, 342, 402, 408, 409,
425, 431, 439, 442
Gallienus (emperor), 1, 39, 54, 58,
59, 96–99, 102–123, 125, 128,
140, 141, 148, 150, 151, 170,
192, 193, 195, 196, 199, 206,
212, 222, 257, 349, 381, 386,
407
Gallus (*caesar*), 329, 400, 402, 404

Genobaudes or Gennoboudes
(Germanic warlord), 159,
256–258
Geta (emperor), 56–58, 64, 72, 326
Gordianus I. (emperor), 78
Gordianus II. (emperor), 78, 90
Gordianus III. (emperor), 58, 59,
78–80, 93, 102, 400
Gratian (emperor), 34, 224, 250
Gregori(an)us (prefect and jurist),
190, 344
Gregory of Tours (author), 257, 331,
332

H

Hadrian (emperor), 33, 68, 109, 190
Hannibalianus (Constantine's
brother), 397, 399
Hannibalianus (Constantine's
nephew), 388
Hannibalianus (prefect), 172, 189,
191, 235, 308, 398
Helena (Constantine's daughter), 397
Helena (Constantine's mother), 221,
223, 326, 330, 331
Helena (wife of Crispus), 313, 327,
337
Herennius Etruscus (emperor), 91, 95
Hermogenianus (prefect and jurist),
189
Herodianus (author), 40, 58, 61, 62,
64, 74, 75, 77, 78
Honorius (emperor), 224
Hormisdas (Persian prince), 386
Hormisdas I. (Persian king), 134, 180
Hormisdas II. (Persian king), 385
Hostilianus (emperor), 95

I
Ingenuus (usurper), 98, 102, 112

J

- Jerome (author), 7, 22, 25, 31, 36, 37, 39, 83, 85, 87, 101, 106, 124, 149, 184, 226, 228, 229, 232, 253, 258, 261, 329, 332, 335, 337, 362, 377, 411, 434, 440, 441
- Jesus (god), 100, 143, 224, 285, 365, 370, 383, 430
- Jordanes (author), 36, 39, 75, 83, 87, 90–93, 101, 106, 115, 149, 185, 317, 322, 376, 381, 411
- Jotapianus (usurper), 84
- Jovian (emperor), 29, 30, 112, 249, 299
- Julia Domna (empress), 64, 71, 441
- Julia Maesa (empress), 64, 70, 71
- Julia Mamaea (empress), 64, 70, 71
- Julian (emperor), 20, 25, 27–29, 31, 38, 39, 70, 82, 146, 178, 182, 192, 206, 222, 236, 251, 255, 259, 263, 284, 285, 308, 328, 330, 348, 349, 362, 379, 380, 385, 388, 399–405, 410, 411, 416, 424, 427
- Julia Soaemias (empress), 64, 70
- Julius Julianus (prefect), 31, 343, 385
- Junius Bassus (prefect), 343, 346
- Jupiter (god), 66, 142, 154, 211, 241, 295, 362
- Justinian (emperor), 39, 72, 422, 423
- Juvenal (author), 35

L

- Lactantius (author), 7, 9, 20, 21, 85, 87, 93, 100, 101, 154, 169, 172, 173, 176, 181, 185, 186, 189, 197, 203, 204, 213, 214, 230, 231, 237–243, 246, 247, 251, 252, 258, 261–263, 266–268, 272, 274, 277–284, 286,

291–294, 298, 299, 307, 314, 433, 441

- Lactus (prefect), 45, 46, 48
- Libanius (author), 20
- Licinius (*caesar*), 13
- Licinius (tetrarch), 174
- Livius (author), 40
- Lydus, Joannes (author), 423–425
- M**
- Macrianus (usurper), 113
- Macrianus II. (usurper), 103, 113
- Macrinus (emperor), 6, 62–66, 72, 75, 154, 326
- Magnentius (usurper), 348, 404, 427
- Malalas, Joannes (author), 175, 183
- Mamertinus (author of panegyrics of the years 289 and 291), 129, 234, 417
- Marcomer (Germanic warlord), 257
- Marcus Aurelius (emperor), 49, 50, 54, 57, 64, 85, 102, 385
- Marius (usurper), 104, 135, 136, 248
- Marius Maximus (author), 34, 35
- Mars (god), 142, 301
- Martinianus (emperor), 320, 321
- Maxentius (usurper), 5, 10, 12, 127, 168, 173, 175, 188, 189, 239, 240, 242, 265, 266, 268–271, 273, 275–278, 281, 283, 286–296, 298–301, 342, 349, 356, 357, 361, 402, 409, 410, 418, 424, 425, 427, 430, 431, 440
- Maximian (tetrarch), 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 25, 129, 154–160, 168, 169, 171–179, 185, 186, 189, 192, 196, 197, 215, 234–237, 239–241, 248, 256, 257, 265, 268–273, 276–278, 281, 284, 294, 296, 308, 333, 408–410, 417, 434, 435, 439

Maximinus Daia (tetrarch), 3, 174,
185, 186, 215, 238, 262, 266,
274–276, 342, 344, 426

Maximinus Thrax (emperor), 85, 154,
326

Maximus (*caesar*), 77

Menophilus (senator), 78–80

Merogaisus (Germanic warlord), 267

Miltiades (bishop of Rome), 303, 365

Minervina (Constantine's wife or
concubine), 237, 247

Mithra or Mithras (god), 70, 141,
275

Munderic (Germanic warlord), 254,
255

N

Narseh (Persian king), 157, 180–182,
184, 274, 385–387

Naulobatus (Germanic warlord), 119

Nazarius (author), 231, 301, 313,
416

Nero (emperor), 54, 68, 85, 86, 200,
201

Nerva (emperor), 34, 35, 169

Nestorius Timonianus (prefect), 345

Numerianus (emperor), 150–154, 189

O

Odaenathus, 101, 113–116, 122,
123, 398

Olympiodorus (author), 38

Optatianus Porfyrius, Publilius
(author), 7, 20, 23, 195, 319,
328, 410

Orosius (author), 24–26, 30, 36, 37,
39, 83, 101, 106, 226, 252, 258,
261, 278, 321, 322, 329, 412,
434

Ossius (bishop), 366–371, 373

Otho (emperor), 47

P

Pacatianus (usurper), 84, 92

Pacatus Drepanius (author), 250, 416

Palladas (author), 27, 364

Papinianus (prefect and jurist), 72

Papius Pacatianus (prefect), 345

Paulus Diaconus (author), 30

Paulus (prefect and jurist), 72

Pertinax (emperor), 45–48, 50, 52,
54, 63, 206

Pescennius Niger (emperor), 47–49,
53, 102, 248, 360

Petronius Annianus (prefect), 343

Petrus Patricius (author), 39

Philippus Arabs (emperor), 81

Philippus II. (emperor), 83

Philostorgius (author), 35, 36, 172,
225, 229, 253, 258, 261,
330–332, 335, 363, 381–384

Photius (author), 23, 36, 38, 39

Pliny the Elder (author), 40, 68

Pliny the Younger (author), 40, 86,
350, 416

Plotinus (philosopher), 81, 114, 115

Polemios Silvius (author), 33, 227

Pompey (triumvir), 231

Pomponius Ianuarianus (prefect), 191,
192, 235

Porphyrius (philosopher), 81, 115

Postumus (usurper), 103–106, 111,
113–116, 132, 135, 136, 138,
248

Praxagoras (author), 7, 10, 23, 236,
320

Prisca (Diokletian's wife), 282, 299,
403, 442

Priscus (perfect), 94

Priscus (usurper), 79, 80, 91

Probus (emperor), 3, 107, 130, 131,
143, 145–147, 150, 151, 211,
223, 389

Probus (prefect), 270

Probus (prefect of Egypt), 146, 232
 Proculus (perfect), 344, 351
 Proculus (usurper), 147
 Pupienus (emperor), 78, 79, 400

Q

Quietus (usurper), 103, 113
 Quintillus (emperor), 2, 3, 124, 126,
 146, 150, 408, 411

R

Rausimod (barbarian warlords),
 317–319
 Regalianus (usurper), 102, 112
 Respa (Germanic warlord), 115
 Romula (mother of Galerius), 175
 Rufinus, Tyrannius (author), 35, 36,
 374
 Ruricius Pompeianus (prefect), 288

S

Sabinianus (usurper), 80
 Sabinus Julianus (usurper), 153, 195
 Sallustius (author), 290
 Sallustius (prefect), 192
 Salonina (empress), 115
 Saloninus (*caesar*), 106
 Saturninus (usurper), 147
 Scipio the Elder, 231
 Senecio, 309
 Septimius Severus (emperor), 1, 2, 6,
 47, 48, 51–55, 59, 63, 64, 72,
 75, 76, 85, 102, 110, 113, 127,
 154, 196, 198, 246, 248, 259,
 291, 346, 360, 389, 419
 Severianus (son of the tetrarch
 Severus), 299, 403
 Severus Alexander (emperor), 34,
 71–74, 102, 114, 188, 326

Severus (tetrarch), 3, 11, 48–58, 174,
 239, 242, 245, 246, 260–262,
 266, 268–270, 274, 286, 288,
 360, 409, 425, 431
 Shapur I. (Persian king), 80, 134, 180
 Shapur II. (Persian king), 386
 Sidonius Apollinaris (author), 329,
 331, 332
 Silvanus (usurper), 348
 Socrates Scholasticus (author), 7, 226,
 253, 258, 291, 311, 321, 330,
 361, 440
 Sol Invictus (god), 68, 70, 141–143,
 363
 Sozomen (author), 35, 228, 229,
 232, 285, 330–332, 361, 381
 Suetonius (author), 22, 34, 35
 Sulpicianus (senator), 46
 Sulpicius Alexander (author), 257
 Sunno (Germanic warlord), 257
 Symmachus (author), 250
 Syncellus, Georgius (author), 40, 90,
 118, 119, 123

T

Tacitus (author), 146, 290
 Tacitus (emperor), 145, 146, 150,
 151
 Tetricus (usurper), 136–138, 140,
 207, 248
 Theodora (empress), 172, 234, 235,
 252, 308, 398, 399
 Theodoret (author), 35, 229, 330,
 381
 Theodosius I. (emperor), 29, 34, 224,
 250, 254
 Theophanes (author), 40
 Thuruar (Germanic warlord), 115
 Tiberius (emperor), 350
 Timesitheus (prefect), 79–81, 83

Trajan (emperor), 45, 54, 68, 85, 86,
108, 110, 128, 143, 182, 350,
379, 385, 388, 389, 415, 416
Trebonianus Gallus (emperor), 54,
58, 82, 91, 93, 95, 96, 102, 154

U

Ulfila (bishop), 381–385
Ulpianus (prefect and jurist), 71
Urania (goddess), 67
Uranus Antoninus (usurper), 95

V

Vadomarius (Germanic warlord), 27,
255
Valens (emperor of the years
316–317), 310
Valens (emperor of the years
364–378), 29, 31, 250
Valentinian I. (emperor), 255
Valentinian II. (emperor), 30
Valeria (Diocletian's daughter), 20,
21, 172, 173, 281–283, 299,
403, 442
Valeria Maximilla (daughter of
Galerius), 173, 265, 281, 295
Valerianus (*caesar*), 96
Valerianus (emperor), 59, 85, 89,
96–102, 107, 113, 150, 206,
212, 257
Valerius Felix (prefect), 345
Valerius Maximus (prefect), 344, 346

Valerius Romulus (son of Maxentius),
265
Veduco (Germanic warlord), 115
Verconnius Herennianus (prefect),
191
Vespasian (emperor), 47, 68, 108,
419
Victorinus (usurper), 104, 122, 136,
138, 248
Vitalianus (prefect), 77
Vitellius (emperor), 47
Vologaeses V. (Parthian king), 61
Volusianus (*caesar*), 95
Volusianus (prefect), 96, 276

Z

Zenobia, 4, 116, 123, 127, 130, 131,
133, 135, 137, 141, 225
Zonaras (author), 38, 40, 79, 82, 83,
87, 93, 103, 106, 111, 114, 117,
118, 120, 121, 123, 153, 226,
321, 331, 332, 335, 401, 427,
434
Zosimus (author), 37–39, 71, 74,
82–84, 87, 93, 95–97, 101, 103,
106, 107, 111, 112, 114, 116,
118–121, 123–126, 132, 133,
135, 138, 144–146, 148, 198,
224, 225, 247, 250, 253, 258,
261, 265, 272, 274, 278, 284,
286, 293–295, 311, 313, 317,
318, 320, 321, 330–332, 335,
341, 342, 401, 424–427, 434,
440, 441

INDEX OF NATIONS AND TERMS

Note: This index includes names of nations and tribes, living both inside and outside the Roman empire. Furthermore, it includes important or frequently used terms, such as technical or legal terms, and some titles or offices. Generic terms, as well as various imperial, honorific or victory titles, are omitted.

A

adaeratio, 359
aes, 55, 355
Alamanni, 3, 61, 74, 98, 105, 111, 112, 120, 129, 146, 148, 156, 159, 186, 197, 254–258, 267, 327, 328, 348, 349, 424
Alans, 36
annona, 127, 179, 207, 209, 211, 354
antoninianus, 58, 59, 138, 140
Arabs, 82
Argaragantes, 377, 378
argenteus, 200–205, 357
Arianism, 21, 36, 37, 373
as, 55
aurelianus, 137, 138, 140, 201, 205
aureus, 54, 55, 59, 66, 139, 140, 200, 202, 204, 356, 359

B

bagaudae, 155–157
Bastarnae (= Peuci or Peucini), 92, 97, 120, 130, 148, 149, 185, 348
Blemmyes, 147, 183
Borani, 97
Bructeri, 267
Bucinobantes, 255
Burgundians, 97, 129, 147, 156

C

caput, capitatio, 208–210
Carpi, 79, 80, 83, 92–94, 97, 129, 130, 134, 181, 184–186, 238, 275, 348
Codex Justinianus, 20, 190, 212
Codex Theodosianus, 20

collatio (lustralis, glebalis), 359
comitatenses, 198, 199, 347
comitatus, 199, 242, 243, 347, 349,
 350, 352
consecratio, 6, 335
consilium principis, 52, 178, 349,
 350, 352
consistorium, 178, 352, 354, 355
constitutio Antoniniana, 59
Consularia Constantinopolitana, 24,
 184, 227

D

Dacians, 75
damnatio memoriae, 6, 7, 9, 10, 21,
 50, 57, 65, 70, 78, 87, 278, 280,
 296, 299, 301, 311, 321, 322,
 325, 326, 335–337, 399, 404,
 439
decennalia, 8, 51, 114, 115, 295,
 297, 300, 302
denarius, 54, 55, 58, 59, 140, 201,
 206
 Donatism, 216, 303, 304, 365
donativa, 206, 338, 359
dupondius, 55
dux (all meanings), 127, 197

E

Epitome de Caesaribus, 7, 26, 34,
 228, 255, 330, 439
equites singulares Augusti, 45, 48,
 296, 349

F

follis (as coin), 355
follis senatorius, 359
 Franks, 3, 146, 158, 159, 187, 254,
 256, 257, 266, 267, 277, 299,
 300, 327, 328, 348, 434, 435

G

Gepids, 120, 129, 148
 Germani, 74, 75, 97, 105, 136, 155,
 156, 158, 159, 187, 254, 256,
 277, 287, 349, 404, 424
 Getae, 148
 Goths, 3, 30, 36, 75, 79, 80, 83,
 90–97, 113, 115–117, 119, 120,
 122, 127–130, 134, 145, 146,
 185, 186, 238, 317–319, 322,
 373–376, 378–385, 407

H

Heruli, 97, 116–120, 145, 146, 156
Historia Augusta (HA), 22, 26,
 33–35, 39, 74, 79, 82, 101–103,
 106, 114, 115, 117–120, 123,
 124, 131, 132, 135, 141, 144,
 147, 148, 189, 191, 221, 223,
 232, 411, 412
homoousios, 370, 371
honestiores and *humiliores*, 60

I

Isaurians, 147
iugum and *iugatio*, 208, 209, 359

J

Jews, 67, 88, 89, 279
 Juthungi, 105, 106, 125–127, 134

K

Kaisergeschichte (KG), 26, 28, 30, 34,
 132, 181, 187, 228, 291, 332

L

legio I Minervia Pia Fidelis, 109
legio I Parthica, 50
legio II Augusta, 108

legio II Parthica, 64, 78, 196
legio III Augusta, 77
legio III Diocletiana, 420
legio III Gallica, 64, 65
legio III Parthica, 50
legio VII Gemina, 108
legio XIII Gemina, 128
libertini, 60
 Limigantes, 377, 378
limitanei, 198, 347

M

magister militum (equitum, peditum),
 112, 199, 347, 348, 354
mansiones, 60, 246
 Marcomanni, 98, 149
miliarensis, 357
mithraeum, 70, 275
 mithraism, 69, 70, 141

N

Nobatae, 183
Notitia Dignitatum, 29, 37, 192,
 254, 255, 346, 353
nummus, 201, 203–205, 355, 356,
 358, 359

O

Origo Constantini imperatoris, 7, 9,
 24, 328, 410
 Ostrogoths, 120, 127, 129

P

Panegyrici Latini, 7, 434
 Parthians, 51, 61–63, 100
peregrini dediticii, 60
 Persians, 74, 80, 97, 100–102, 130,
 134, 152, 156, 180–182, 197,
 255, 386, 387, 403

Picts, 9, 246, 249, 252, 287
pomerium, 67
pontifex maximus, 5, 104, 304, 364
 praetorians, 45, 46, 58, 70, 72, 73,
 78, 79, 84, 112, 188, 189, 206,
 266, 400, 419, 421
 prefect (as praetorian prefect), 45, 46,
 48, 52, 57, 62, 63, 65, 71, 72,
 75, 77, 79, 81, 101, 119, 123,
 127, 146, 150, 152, 153, 172,
 179, 180, 187–194, 198, 199,
 233, 235, 251, 270, 276, 288,
 314, 342–347, 354, 399
 prefect (as urban prefect of Rome),
 23, 28, 65, 153, 192, 195, 235,
 351, 355
proconsul Achaiae, 23
proconsul Africae, 154, 189, 233,
 351, 416
proconsul Asiae, 29, 31
protector, 131, 222, 223, 225, 226,
 238

R

*refutatio imperii (or recusatio
 imperii)*, 46, 62, 74, 249
Res gestae divi Saporis, 80–82, 95,
 101
ripenses, 198, 347

S

Sarmatians, 3, 75, 151, 156, 185,
 269, 276, 294, 317–319, 348,
 373–379, 385, 403, 404
scholae palatinae, 199, 242, 349, 353
 Scythians, 79, 90, 97, 115–117, 120,
 145
Scythia (province), 319
sestertius, 54, 55, 59, 201
siliqua, 357, 358
solidus, 200, 356–359

stipendia, 206, 359

Suda, 38

Suebi, 36

T

Taifali, 92, 129

tricennalia, 22, 384, 399, 433

V

Vandals, 36, 92, 125, 126, 129, 147,
148

via Agrippa, 435

via Appia, 50

vicarius, 193

vicennalia, 23, 185, 186, 241, 295,
297, 337, 338, 370

Visigoths, 120, 129

INDEX OF PLACES

Note: This index includes names of Roman dioceses, provinces and important or frequently mentioned cities and places. Places outside the Roman empire, if mentioned repeatedly, are also included here.

A

- Abrittus, 91, 94
Achaea or *Achaia* (province), 109
Adiabene, 182
Adrianople, 299, 310
Aegean sea, 118
Aegyptus Herculia, 346
Aegyptus Iovia, 346
Africa (diocese), 194
Africa (nothern Africa in general, except for Egypt), 48, 63, 77, 78, 99, 147, 176, 177, 215, 245, 266, 271, 276, 286, 295, 303, 344, 345, 355, 403, 404, 409, 425
Africa proconsularis (province), 77
agri decumates, 61, 104, 105, 113, 128, 147, 159, 160
Alba (city), 50, 78
Alba (mountain range), 147
Alexandria, 27, 61, 89, 135, 183, 206, 365–368, 371, 372
Alps, 105, 176, 425
Ancyra, 123, 367
Antioch, 49, 51, 61, 65, 74, 80, 81, 95, 97, 100, 113, 123, 133, 144, 176, 178, 181, 237, 345, 367, 401, 404
Antonine Wall, 56
Apulum, 68
Aquilaia, 78, 79, 98, 124, 177, 178, 236, 286–288, 333, 355, 357, 404
Aquincum, 125
Aquitaine, 136
Arabia (both region and province), 114, 123, 254
Arelate or Arles, 277
Armenia, 83, 156, 157, 180–182, 255, 385–388, 398

Asia Minor, 48, 49, 51, 53, 67, 69,
73, 86, 115, 117, 121, 123,
131–133, 145–147, 176, 177,
203, 206, 209, 213, 214, 223,
225, 232, 245, 281, 282, 298,
299, 360, 367, 369, 412, 419

Asiana (diocese), 194

Asia (province), 29, 195

Athens, 37, 115, 117, 118, 401

Augusta Taurinorum (Turin), 287

Augusta Vindelicorum (Augsburg),
105

B

Babylon, 51

Baetica (province), 109

Balkans, 2, 49, 51, 53, 74, 90, 94,
116, 117, 119, 121, 135, 136,
177, 206, 221, 234, 276, 286,
298, 310, 314, 319, 355, 369,
398, 403, 404, 407, 427

Barbalissos, 95

Beroe (in Thrace), 94, 310

Bithynia, 65, 86, 123, 131, 177, 223,
225

Black Sea, 79, 97, 115–118, 145

Bononia (in Gaul), 157, 160, 180,
247

Bosporus, 130, 281, 320, 360

Bostra, 82

Britain, 6, 9, 12, 36, 47, 49, 56, 104,
147, 149, 158, 160, 177, 197,
207, 245–248, 251–255, 257,
259, 262, 266, 287, 314, 343,
369, 403, 404, 409, 417, 425,
427, 430

Britanniae (diocese), 194

Brixia, 288

Byzacena (province), 351

Byzantium, 49, 118, 130, 134, 144,
157, 299, 310, 320, 360, 361

C

Caesarea (in Mauretania), 63

Callinicum, 181

Campania, 115

Capitol, 295

Cappadocia, 97, 131, 145, 299, 321,
381, 382

Carnuntum, 10, 47, 48, 51, 70, 241,
270–273, 275, 276, 283, 284,
409

Carrhae, 49, 62, 77, 80, 100, 101,
181

Carthage, 66, 77, 80, 99, 303, 323,
345, 357

Chalcedon, 65, 115, 320, 360

Chrysopolis, 118, 320, 349, 426

Cibalae, 310, 426, 441

Cilicia, 28, 101, 114, 299

Circesium, 81

Cologne, 104, 106, 147, 158, 435

Commagene, 69

Constantinople, 3, 13, 22, 23, 36,
226, 331, 341, 344, 345,
360–363, 372, 373, 376, 378,
382–384, 388, 399, 401, 404,
422, 423, 433

Crete, 72, 121

Ctesiphon, 51, 61, 81, 114, 151, 182

Cyprus, 114, 121, 193

Cyzicus, 124, 225, 355

D

Dacia (region north of Danube), 83,
94, 113, 128–130, 136, 142,
238, 274

Dacia Mediterranea, 130, 233

Dacia Ripensis, 124, 130, 175, 222

Dalmatia (province), 223

Danube, 54, 61, 74, 75, 79, 84, 90,
92–94, 115, 127–129, 134, 148,
151, 153, 155, 156, 159,
175–177, 179, 181, 185, 198,

206, 222, 240, 245, 257, 269,
274–276, 296, 317, 319, 373,
374, 379, 380, 385, 419, 424,
427
Dardania (province), 222
 Drepanum, 223, 225
 Durostorum, 381

E

Eboracum, 56, 246
 Edessa, 61, 62, 77, 80, 100, 101
 Egypt, 26, 37, 49, 51–53, 61, 72, 73,
87, 95, 99, 110, 113, 123, 130,
131, 135, 146, 176, 177,
181–184, 192, 195–198, 204,
206, 209, 213, 232, 235, 298,
346, 361, 369, 372, 373, 419,
420
 Emesa, 64, 66, 68, 70, 95, 101, 113,
133, 141
 Emona, 310
 Ephesus, 115
 Euphrates, 49, 51, 81, 95, 101, 182
Europa (province), 351

F

Felix Romuliana, 281, 282

G

Galatia (province), 123, 131
Galliae (diocese), 194
 “Gallic Empire”, 103, 104, 122, 132,
135, 136, 138, 140, 155, 170,
207, 225, 248
 Gaul, 10, 33, 49, 84, 103–106, 122,
136, 137, 146–149, 151,
155–158, 160, 177, 180, 192,
245, 257, 266–272, 276, 277,
286, 287, 299, 314, 327,
343–345, 348, 354, 355, 369,

403, 404, 409, 415, 425, 430,
434
Germania Inferior (province), 69
Germania Superior (province), 105
 Guntia, 159, 257

H

Hadrian’s Wall, 56, 57, 246
 Heracleia, 299, 355
 Hispania, 36, 49, 122, 136, 149, 176,
177, 193, 245, 250, 268, 272,
314, 343, 345, 355, 369, 371,
403, 409
Hispaniae (diocese), 194
 Hispellum, 363, 364

I

Iberia, 388
 Illyricum, 2, 29, 112, 113, 117, 119,
154, 176, 221, 238, 270, 354,
416
 Interamna, 96, 270
 Issus, 133
Italia (diocese), 194
ingam and *iugatio*, 10, 48–50, 77,
84, 95, 96, 98, 105, 112, 113,
116, 119, 120, 125, 127, 142,
149, 150, 154, 176, 177, 195,
196, 211, 226, 245, 266,
268–270, 276, 277, 283, 284,
286–289, 296, 297, 308, 309,
326, 336, 344–347, 355, 356,
369, 371, 377, 378, 398, 401,
403, 404, 409, 424, 425, 427,
429, 430, 432, 439
 Italy, 10, 48–50, 77, 84, 95, 96, 98,
105, 112, 113, 116, 119, 120,
125, 127, 142, 149, 150, 154,
176, 177, 195, 196, 211, 226,
245, 266, 268–270, 276, 277,
283, 284, 286–289, 296, 297,

308, 309, 326, 336, 344–347,
355, 356, 369, 371, 377, 378,
398, 401, 403, 404, 409, 424,
425, 427, 429, 430, 432, 439

K

Khabur, 81, 95

L

Leptis Magna, 48, 56

Lingones, 186

Lucania, 137, 268

Lugdunum (or Lyon), 50

Lusitania (province), 193

M

Macedonia (both region and
province), 91, 116, 117, 121,
124, 346, 377, 378

Macedonia (diocese), 109, 346

Mainz, 74, 75, 104, 157–159, 255,
257

Marcianopolis, 90, 92, 94, 375

Margus (river), 153, 233

Massilia (or Marseilles), 277, 294,
434, 435

Mauretania, 63

Media, 182

Megara, 360

Mesopotamia (province), 50, 51, 53,
80

Mesopotamia (region), 49, 51, 62,
82, 114, 151, 152, 176, 177,
181, 182, 369

Milan, 111, 112, 116, 119, 120, 124,
154, 160, 161, 172, 177, 178,
193, 196, 236, 239, 245, 268,
286, 287, 297–299, 304, 307,
333, 439, 440

Miletus, 214

Misiche, 81

Moesiae (diocese), 194, 346, 398, 404

Moesia Inferior, 79, 90, 91, 95, 124,
318

Moesia (region), 39, 80, 84, 90–96,
117, 148, 149, 318, 345, 383

Moesia Superior, 95, 119, 124

Mulvian bridge, 198, 265, 288,
290–293, 300, 301, 349, 424,
431, 432, 434–437

Mursa, 112, 427

N

Naissus, 121, 122, 125, 233, 314,
378, 380, 404

Narbonensis (province), 109

Nicaea, 21, 35, 49, 234, 367, 368,
370–373

Nicomedia, 9, 19, 20, 61, 65, 115,
131, 152, 156, 172, 177, 178,
189, 204, 212, 214, 225, 227,
230, 236, 237, 282, 298, 299,
316, 320, 321, 344, 355, 360,
362, 367, 368, 370, 371, 382,
397

Nicopolis ad Istrum, 90

Nisibis, 51, 63, 77, 80, 101, 182, 183

Noricum (region), 110, 195

Noricum Mediterraneum (province),
195

Noricum Ripense (province), 195, 276

Numidia (province), 77

O

Oescus, 90, 91, 129, 374, 375

Oriens (diocese), 194, 281, 346

Osroene (province), 49, 51, 53, 80,
181

Ostia, 69, 355, 357

P

- Palatine, 66, 67, 294
 Palestine (both region and province),
 66, 67, 294
 Palmyra, 101, 113, 133–136, 141
Pannoniae (diocese), 194
 Pannonia (region), 2, 73, 74, 98,
 110, 124, 125, 149, 177, 184,
 185, 194, 276, 378, 398, 404
Pannonia Inferior (province), 84,
 110, 194
 Pannonia secunda (= Pannonia
 Inferior from c. 340), 28
Pannonia Superior (province), 48,
 110, 194
 Paphlagonia, 86, 131
 Parthia, 51, 61, 62, 73
 Persia, 33, 74, 101, 114, 133, 134,
 144, 150, 182, 213, 214, 229,
 385–389, 398, 404, 427
 Pessinus, 67
 Philippopolis (in Syria), 82
 Philippopolis (in Thrace), 32, 90–92,
 94
 Phoenicia (both region and province),
 32, 255, 372
 Placentia, 125, 136
 Pola, 329, 333
Pontica (diocese), 194, 404

R

- Raetia* (province), 61, 104, 276
 Ratiaria, 129
 Ravenna, 125, 177, 269
 Rhesaina, 50, 77
 Rhine, 74–76, 98, 146, 158–160,
 177, 179, 180, 187, 255, 257,
 267, 296, 299, 300, 314, 404,
 424, 427, 434, 435
 Rhodes, 121
 Rome, 5, 8, 19, 20, 32, 33, 35, 36,
 45, 48, 50, 51, 54, 57, 61, 62,

- 65–75, 77–79, 82–84, 86, 88,
 91, 94–98, 113, 114, 120,
 124–127, 130, 134, 135,
 137–140, 142, 143, 145, 148,
 152, 156, 160, 167, 177, 178,
 182, 186, 188, 191, 192, 195,
 206, 211, 236, 241, 254, 256,
 265, 268–271, 274, 288–297,
 300, 301, 303, 313, 327, 331,
 333, 342, 353, 355, 357, 361,
 364, 365, 384, 385, 387, 399,
 400, 403, 416, 419, 421, 424,
 429

S

- Salona, 153, 273, 276, 282, 299, 442
 Sardinia, 266, 271
 Satala, 181
Savensis (province), 195
 Saxa Rubra, 290, 293
 Sea of Azov, 317, 319
 Sea of Marmara, 118, 121, 225, 360,
 362, 388
 Segusio, 287
 Seleucia, 51, 151
 Serdica, 19, 130, 176, 178, 276, 310,
 314, 355, 357, 360
 Sicily, 23, 266, 351, 425
 Singara, 50, 77, 80
 Singidunum, 378
 Sirmium, 75, 77, 79, 84, 122, 124,
 146, 150, 154, 156, 172,
 176–178, 250, 310, 314, 360,
 399, 403, 404
 Siscia, 124, 146, 355, 377, 410
 Smyrna, 88
 Spoletium, 96
 Sucidava, 374
 Syene, 183
 Syria (both region and province),
 47–49, 51, 53, 69, 81, 82, 84,
 95–97, 109, 114, 123, 130–133,

135, 146, 147, 177, 181, 183,
195, 206, 209, 282, 298, 347

T

Tarsus, 133, 146, 299
Thebais, 183, 196, 198, 346
Thessalonica, 11, 19, 117, 121, 176,
178, 276, 281, 318–322, 355,
360, 404
Thrace, 75, 80, 116, 121, 144, 145,
148, 177, 222, 270, 299, 310,
318, 320, 345, 377, 426
Thracia (diocese), 194, 310, 378,
398, 403, 404
Tiber, 70, 290, 291, 293, 295
Ticinum, 120, 126, 301, 302, 355
Tigris, 49, 156, 182, 385
Trier, 20, 136, 157, 158, 177, 178,
234, 245, 267, 269, 299, 300,

307, 314, 333, 336, 345,
355–357, 360, 372, 401, 408,
409, 415, 417, 418, 425, 430,
432, 434, 435

Tyana, 131–133, 145
Tyre, 372

U

Umbria, 363

V

Valeria (province), 195
Verona, 84, 177, 288
Viennensis (diocese), 194
Viminacium, 206, 314, 378, 404
Vindonissa, 186